



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07480515 5









A Gingham Rose

By ALICE WOODS ULLMAN

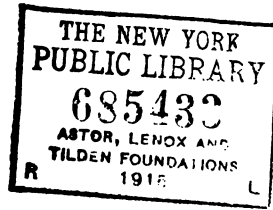


ILLUSTRATED BY
THE AUTHOR

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers

New York



COPYRIGHT 1904
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
—
APRIL

WOMAN
CLUB
YOUNG

A GINGHAM ROSE

CHAPTER I

Hey, rose, just born,
Twin to a thorn.

—SIDNEY LANIER.

Two girls and two young men were standing on the stair-landing of a New York boarding-house, their heads close together, and chattering like magpies. The occasion was more important than serious. There was to be a *bal masqué* that very night, and the final details must be arranged. The dance was to close the spring term of the New York School of Art with a frolic that should deftly tend to make return irresistible.

"Let's walk; it's only six blocks. We'll save the cab-hire for another lark." The practical suggestion came from one of the girls; a tall, slim, boyish sort of girl she was, with blue eyes, a clear skin that the color played over as the

A GINGHAM ROSE

weather-vane points the breeze, and a quantity of smooth black hair, which she wore daringly in two long braids.

"Lovely!" chuckled the other girl, hugging Anne's arm. "You always have the right idea about things, Nancy."

"Um-m," commented Anne; "think so, Ruthy?" She bestowed a patient smile on the top of Ruth's fluffy yellow head.

"Are you girls sure you won't mind walking in your party togs?" asked Victor Stetson, a tall, stoop-shouldered fellow with a thin, attractive face that was written all over with admiration for whatever the black pigtailed and blue eyes wanted to do.

The braids tossed. "We can go to a theater for the price of a cab." That settled the matter, and Ruth decided to endure the walk with a smile.

The other young man was a medical student who lived in their boarding-house and had been asked to go along with them to the dance. Anne had dubbed him the Man-eater. "Be ready on time?" he asked with a glance at his watch, as the two girls started upstairs. Ruth hurried

A GINGHAM ROSE

away, but Anne cast a glance of amused scorn over her shoulder and proceeded deliberately to her room.

The still-life studio had been turned over to the girls for a dressing-room. The copper pots and kettles, bits of brass, scarlet peppers and satin-coated onions were put upon the shelf and forced out of focus by the presence of mirrors and make-up stuffs.

"Now, Vic," said Anne at the dressing-room door when they arrived, "you two go in as soon as you are ready and don't bother waiting for us. If we go in by ourselves they won't guess us so easily."

"Anybody 'd know you anywhere," said Victor, trying to cover his anxiety to be seen by all the world taking Anne into the room.

"Well, goosey," she laughed, "that's no reason why they need to know you too, is it?"

Victor threw up his hands, and with a half-hurt gaze disappeared.

Two big studios had been thrown together, the partition being portable for just such occasions. One end of the room was cut off by a row of box-wood and cedar trees in tubs, and the inclosed

A GINGHAM ROSE

space filled with tables and chairs, and lighted with Japanese lanterns. "For the distribution of rations and the furtherance of intrigue," the committee announced, and certainly the corner served faithfully both its destinies. After some discussion it had been decided to put all the funds into "rations" and, except for the strings of Jap lanterns across the big skylights, to let the artistic atmosphere of the place be its own decoration.

However, some one got in at the last moment and dressed up the old stove. The chest in the costume-class studio was burglarized and a pair of old pink satin stays and a tulle skirt were stretched about the iron ribs to the limit of their capacity. Slippers were put on the three claw feet, two drawn back and the other pulled as far forward as possible, till the old stove seemed about to reel off in a highland fling. A face was painted on the coal-bucket and a picture hat tied on top. The whole effect was fairly simpering. The fiddlers, selected for cheapness and endurance, were enthroned on a model stand. Boys and girls in all sorts of garb and masks floated about

A GINGHAM ROSE

the big place incongruously, the color and movement kaleidoscopic, fascinating.

Anne was vivid in the rich, warm light of the place, the excitement like wine to her. She wore a dress of pink that threw a flush over her white skin and made her look like a big fresh rose. "Ruthy," she whispered, "you never looked so pretty. Just like an angel."

"Goodness, do I?" laughed Ruth, happily. "I was only intended for a butterfly!"

The Man-eater, lost to identity in a deep purple domino and mask, made faithful background to Ruth's golden head, white dress and wings. Victor Stetson and John Warren, his best friend and Anne's only rebel in an otherwise obedient kingdom of slaves, were to take part in a cake-walk and were, accordingly, veritable masterpieces of plain-spoken stripes and beseeching plaids.

Anne and Ruth were no sooner inside the door than they were surrounded by a flock of clowns, cavaliers, Chinamen, cowboys, war chiefs and princes from all the nations of earth, begging for dances. Not one dance ahead would Anne

A GINGHAM ROSE

give to any one. "So much more exciting that way," she laughed, and shook her head at Ruth, who was hunting a piece of drawing-paper to write down her dances.

Ruth smiled back. "I do wish I had your courage. But it would scare me awfully to be a wall-flower. Feels so safe to have a lot ahead."

"May I have all you have left?" came a voice from the depths of the purple domino.

"Oh, how nice!" gasped Ruth, with a puzzled glance at the purple mask, her chin showing very pink at the edge of her own white one.

"Silly," laughed Anne, with a knowing smile at the Man-eater. "Better save some for possibilities." And she floated away on the arm of a lucky Chinaman, whirling about the big shadowy place like a giddy pink cloud that had somehow lost its parent sunset.

"Isn't she lovely?" sighed Ruth, watching Anne. "If it weren't for her black pigtailed I'd think we were all wrong about it, and that the angels really dress in pink."

"*Once* I might have agreed with you," came forth in a deep, purple voice, "but now I know that the old story is right and that they wear

A GINGHAM ROSE

white and have golden hair and no pigtails at all. Come, we are losing time!" So the two girls went about having a good time, each after her own heart and habit.

Just before the cake-walk, while the participants were standing around in dusky groups waiting for the signal, Anne suddenly appeared before Victor. He was marvelously got up.

"Really, Victorious, you are a confection!" She made him a sweeping bow. He was fairly submerged in his make-up. A black false-face, a curled-hair wig, a neck-breaking stock, enormous shoes with white "spats," and clothes that were a dissipation in excess, all topped by a wide panama hat of the most conscious irregularity. The girl came close to him and peered curiously into his mask, then putting her hands together eagerly, she whispered: "Vic, you delicious, hideous thing, if you'll just beat John out of that cake, I'll—Vic, I'll dance three straight dances with you! Honestly I will!"

"Is you pestahed in you' mind, honey chile?" drawled Vic, with a lilt that for a moment got the better of the girl's eagerness. Then she drew herself up and her blue eyes shone.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I'm awfully mad at John, Vic; honestly I am."

"And I am to play second fiddle?" asked Victor, with no trace of the "sunny South" in word or manner.

"No, no, not a bit of it; truly, Vic. I wouldn't use you that way, Vic; you know I wouldn't. Truly, I'm in dead earnest."

"You flattah me, Sistah Preston," said the boy, with his elaborately gloved hand over his heart. Then he broke into the traditional, explosive, minstrel-show laugh and finished off with an amazing flap of his shoes.

"Oh," chuckled Anne, looking at the shoes, "they sound like soggy pancakes!"

"Fo' de Lo'd, Miss Anne, 'f you go a-talkin' to me 'bout pancakes I won't be able to swing a foot!" He stood before her with folded arms. "How'd Brothah Warren make you mad, chile?"

Anne laughed to herself and stood looking at Victor, as if doubtful whether to tell, but at that moment John appeared in the doorway. The color rose again and she shrugged her girlish shoulders.

"He called me names," she smiled; then her

A GINGHAM ROSE

face grew so serious that Victor could not tell where the joke and earnest began and left off.

"What!" he shouted in mock horror. "Brothah Warren called you names!" He made an ominous pause while the ridiculous false-face grinned stolidly. "I'll beat him out o' dat cake if it paralyzes all 'f me membahs! I will indeed, Miss Anne." After another pigeon-wing or two he collapsed. "What'll you do, Miss Anne, 'f Brothah Warren wins dat cake?"

"I'll get you expelled for disorderly conduct and dance those three dances with John—Chinaman!" she finished, laughing. "You villain, let go of my braid," she cried, wheeling just in time to save one of her hair-ribbons from the envious heathen whose rented pigtail was a pale shade by the side of one of hers. She held the ribbon in her hand a moment, considering first the Chinaman and then Victor, then with a crushing look at the yellow heathen and an adorable smile for the black man, she took the scarlet ribbon from his stick and tied the pink one on instead.

"Pink is so much more distinguished than red," she said. "Luck to you, Vic," she whis-

A GINGHAM ROSE

pered. "Make little pieces of John; please do, please!"

Victor laughed and swung away, for the signal had sounded. Anne ran over and sat by Ruth in the midst of a gay group. Victor shuffled and threw out his chest and handled his feet with a dexterity so nearly professional and so altogether amusing that all the contestants except one went in for second place with a cheerful deference to his superiority; but that rose-colored hair-ribbon of Anne's and this last "misunderstanding," which, to his mind, was the most unreasonable freak that she had ever been guilty of, goaded John to renewed effort. He watched his chance, then started a mincing step and held it cleverly the length of the studio. Anne's heart went heavy. Victor stood to one side, shuffling aimlessly and watching behind his grinning mask, then, with a glance at the girl who looked so bewilderingly like a rose, he followed John with the same mincing step, but with a series of variations added that made the old place ring with applause.

The cake was easily Victor's and was presented by James,—James, whose position has

A GINGHAM ROSE

never been defined, but who does everything from building fires to arbitrating civil wars, and without whom the school could scarcely go on. Victor immediately turned and placed the cake, with proud humility, on a stool at Anne's feet.

"Oh," she said low, her eyes shining and her color high, "we'll eat every bite of it when we get home to-night! You are a wonder, Vic—a wonder!"

Victor placed his feet in line and made an uncatalogued bow. "May I have the pleasure of the next three dances, Miss Anne?"

Anne laughed and pointed to his shoes.

"Take off those freight-cars," she commanded. "I have no wish to be trampled to death;" and with a withering look at John Chinaman she tied the remaining hair-ribbon in Victor's button-hole. "I'll wait over there for you; hurry!" She gave him a nod and went off with the Chinaman for a glass of punch.

In a little while Victor and John came back to the studio arm-in-arm and looking as fresh as though a cake-walk were still undiscovered. They crossed the room together and Anne's dizzy head was full of triumph for what she saw was

A GINGHAM ROSE

bound to happen. John, as she had devoutly hoped he would, stooped over her chair in his own charming way and asked for the next dance. She was silent, letting the good moment sink in; then with a bright look at Victor, who was standing modestly aside, she said sweetly: "Victor has the next three dances. They go with the cake!"

They danced beautifully together and as they finished the third dance, Anne said: "Vic, let's go home after this; it's good enough to stop with. Leave me over there by the door where I can watch things while you hunt up Ruth and the Man-eater. They won't be hard to find,—at least they'll be together! Then bring me my coat here. I'll wait; I want to look at things a moment. Isn't it the prettiest sight ever?"

Victor, drunk with the conspicuousness of having had three dances running with the most fascinating girl alive and filled with a conviction that "the queen can do no wrong," fell smiling into the trap. He had no more than left the studio when John appeared before Anne. She looked on him with a vast surprise.

"Anne," he began hesitatingly, "I am sorry if I made you angry to-night. I honestly didn't

A GINGHAM ROSE

The boy's arm tightened about her waist. "I truly did not think, Anne."

"That was just the trouble, John," she smiled. "People always speak the truth when they do not stop to think. Good night," she finished, suddenly raising her eyes to his.

* * *

The next morning Anne stood before a long mirror in her night-dress, combing her hair and humming a tune.

"Sing before breakfast," quoted Ruth, pulling the covers high over her ears.

"Couldn't cry if I wanted to," answered Anne, looking into her own clear eyes in the mirror as she trailed the comb through her black hair, the silver gleaming against the dusk of it. She went on talking to herself. "Do you know, you glass-girl, if it wasn't for daddie I'd go in for regular larks,—I would. I'd about as soon hurt Ruth's feelings, or—anybody's—except daddie's. The trouble is that he has real feelings; he never told me so—that is why I know. Did you know, you glass-girl, that the only things that are so are the things you have never been told? No use telling that to Ruth, though.

A GINGHAM ROSE

She's awfully young; she's just a pup, is Ruth! You were born to laziness. But I'll tell you a secret, Ruthy. One of these days I'm going to have to make my own money. That's one of the things I feel in my bones, you know." Ruth was too sleepy to be alarmed by any idle prophecy and made no comment. "I say, my pigtails are pretty stunning, aren't they? I'd be rather good-looking if I could just persuade myself to go in for growing sideways a while. Miss Sleepy-head, wouldn't it be great never to do one's hair high at all, but to grow up to long-tailed frocks, diamond sunbursts, old-young men, and things, and stick like 'Le Page's Best,' to pigtails? Make a hit, wouldn't it?"

"Crazy!" groaned Ruth, sitting up and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes and yawning prodigiously. "Have you got your French? What time is it?"

"Of course not;—wish you'd drop the 'got.' Fifteen to eight."

"Wish I had your conscience," sighed Ruth.

"You'd be lonesome and I'd never miss it." Anne smiled curiously at herself in the glass and tied her hair-ribbon with elaborate detail.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"What *are* you getting up so early for when you have nothing to do for hours?" and Ruth blinked solemnly at Anne.

"Because of that conscience you were wishing you had, maybe," said Anne. "Better hold tight to your own and take another nap. I'll bring your breakfast up to you," she said suddenly, her eyes taking Ruth in as if with a new idea. She envied Ruth and she was wondering why.

At about the same hour John Warren was brushing his smooth brown hair before a little square mirror and resenting the uncomfortable morning light. He was wondering if talking right out to Anne Preston would bring her to see that she was rather careless about certain little things a fellow does not like best in the girls he likes best. He wondered what he did, really, like best in girls.

John was ambitious. But he had nearly made up his mind to keep away from girls, especially Anne. She was an insistent, troublesome kind of girl and wouldn't let any one take things easily. He wanted his own hand on the rudder, and no one could guess what such a girl would do next. Carefully he poured a mug of fresh water over

A GINGHAM ROSE

the roots of a scarlet geranium that grew in an Indian red crock on his window ledge. He took great care, absently, not to spill one drop of water. He tweaked off a dry brown leaf with a precision fine enough to be almost cruel, then stood fingering the leaf and taking in its veining.

His attention to detail was fairly Japanese in persistence. All things, no matter how trivial, that came beneath his eyes or his sensitive fingers were absorbed and made his very own, photographed and stored away safely in his susceptible brain—a kind and degree of economy certain to prove either of great and good use or to lead to a sort of egotistical covetousness and self-blindness. He glanced out of the window to see the kind of day, put his hat on with care, ever so little “out of plumb,”—how exquisitely the talented sons and daughters of Eve—and Adam—dissemble!—and then realized acutely that he wanted his breakfast.

CHAPTER II

A good stick is a good reason.

—RUDYARD KIPLING.

An ugly gale off Lake Michigan was driving stray bits of paper and stinging venturesome humanity to pell-mell speed. The inner voice of outspoken Chicago was frozen to a whisper, driven to cover like a hunted thing.

Two young men were swept along on the current, their purpose almost entirely absorbed in the very present fight for a footing. They turned down a side street, the mad wind taking them circle-wise, then plunged down a basement stairway into the well of glow and warmth of Rector's, where the gay throng comes and goes, God knows how and why, in spite of, or because of, the cold and gale outside. The polished white marble walls, the tall mirrors, the frosted light of the electric globes were all blurred in the pinkish gray haze of heat and smoke. There were soft-feathered and flowered hats, laces and

A GINGHAM ROSE

furs touched richly into strength by the ample spotting of men in black.

"Who was the girl you bowed to, Stetson? She seemed glad to see you."

"She is glad, bless her. Her name is Preston—Anne Preston." The five years that had gone by had, seemingly, but increased the enthusiasm and loyalty the boy had felt for the girl.

Victor Stetson had settled in Chicago and was now the art-editor of a *fin-de-siècle* publication of art and literature: the kind of production that Chicago's present state of mental digestion feeds on frantically for a day and a night,—then, in frenzy of self-disgust, turns on and kills. The man with him was of the literary staff.

"Fine eyes," remarked the man. "Looks as though she might know things. The usual American bluff?"

"Not much," said Victor, emphatically. "She can reel off clever stuff in half a dozen mediums with a facility that gives a grind like me insomnia. Because it is so easy for her she can't see its value. I knew her first at Chase's in New York, you know. We lived in the same boarding-house two winters; good times, I tell you.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Nancy must be as much as twenty-two now. Isn't it awful?" he smiled.

"I have known worse," laughed the literary man, dryly. "Live here?" he asked absently, lighting one cigarette at the end of another.

"Yes, her father was Lambert Preston. He was thought to have a lot of money, but I fancy things were in a mess when he died. It looks as if Anne would have to turn clever in earnest."

"Ugly thing to have to do," and the literary man yawned.

"That's so," answered Victor. "But it may bring the best of her to the surface. She has a little start—writing, you know."

The literary man shone with sarcasm. "Women all write now. They want something to do between times, I suppose."

Victor laughed. "You don't know the girl. She could make a go of illustration, but she has ideas about it; thinks it a losing, negative kind of art. Besides, she knows a lot of illustrators; there were no end of clever fellows at Chase's in our day, and she has no illusions about the kind of life it is. It's a dog's 'catch and go' existence for a man."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Any sort of 'demnition grind' is hard for a woman, isn't it?" asked the literary man, testily. "I wrote a novel about it once, and, if I remember rightly, I took that point of view. Maybe it was the critics, come to think of it." He wrinkled his brows. "Whoever it was, that is what I think about it. It is so much easier to be windy about what you don't think."

"I wish none of 'em had to work," sighed Victor. "But Anne is a funny sort of girl, and has more temperament than any man I ever knew. Work is the only thing for her. She has changed a lot in the last three years, in a vague, indefinable sort of way. She is a lonesome little beggar; one gets nowhere near her. She seemed to freeze up after her father died. I couldn't stand a square look at her then. Mighty glad to see her out again. She likes places of this sort just the way a man does. They don't touch her; she comes because they are comfortable."

"Know the man with her?" asked the builder of fiction.

"Never saw him before, but that's nothing; she knows men by the score, and takes them about as seriously as she takes her surroundings."

A GINGHAM ROSE

He looks professional, doesn't he? They generally are. She says a profession implies having thought of being something at least once. She always hits it off with clever men,—stupid ones too, for the matter of that. She hit me right between the eyes. Used to wear her hair in pig-tails, has yards of it, fine black, too; trim little head and nice jaw, hasn't she? I never had a bit of show in the running; couldn't hide my feelings, and she made fun of me. I've rather let her be since her father's death and the trouble, for I knew she didn't feel like making fun, and I couldn't stand her taking me seriously. She certainly did have us all going to any tune she liked—even John Warren."

"Warren? She knew him? He does good work."

"I should say he does," said Victor, with the best generosity. "But he was an old youngster, so damned opinionated; stubborn as a mule and a good deal of a fraud, except in his work. He gave Anne an awful snubbing, though I think he was rather fond of her, in a way," he smiled. "Warren is engaged to my cousin, Catherine Gage," he added absently.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"The deuce he is!" said the literary man, characteristically crisp. "That is a risky thing. A painter is not a domestic animal by birth; tamed, he can't do his tricks, or won't; same result, they don't get done. Women are vampires at the throat of a man's talent, anyway. They exhaust his accidentals and his sparkles; that's why they like him. Once in a million years there is one with more sense. She is really worth the risk. If woman there must be, I hope she is that one. The man is worth the time it takes to talk about him. I like his work,—that is why I think it good. Of course, I don't really know." He grinned at his own expense.

An attack of ugly coughing kept Stetson from answering for a moment. Anne looked over her shoulder anxiously.

"Better take care of that cough," said the literary man, with a keen look at Victor's sloping shoulders and at the new lines about his mouth and eyes. "This is the devil's chosen climate."

Victor ignored the diversion and smiled at Anne reassuringly. "To be frank," he continued after a moment, "I've always been a little afraid for Catherine and John. I've never talked

A GINGHAM ROSE

it over. It's a family affair, and one doesn't talk things over with one's family very much. The girl has been brought up with a wall about her, not even a look outside that I know of, except from her aunt's apron strings, and that does not mean scope. She adores John in a pitiful, blind sort of way, but she hasn't the least understanding of his work. She likes 'stylish art.' In her good little heart, I am nearly sure she wishes he'd draw golf-girls and get into Armour's calendars. There is golden prosperity in 'girls,' you know."

"They'd both do well to cut it," said the man, laconically.

"It's a bit late to find that out."

"The last minute is better than a post-mortem."

"I say, cheer up," laughed Stetson. "What an old croaker you are! It will never come to that; they both have common sense."

"Common sense is the straightest highway to the crossroads," grunted the literary man.

Victor looked slightly annoyed. "Anne and Johnny are good friends now; that is one of her clever ways. She can bring a fellow safely

A GINGHAM ROSE

through the 'softy period' and land him a lasting friend. I know," he laughed, "because I am a lasting friend."

"It seems to an untrained eye that you are not altogether out of the 'softy period,'" smiled the man of detail.

"Well, she is worth the trouble," said Stetson.

They finished their drinks in silence and got into their overcoats to go back to the office. Victor stopped a minute by Anne's chair, and the literary man leaned against a pillar with folded arms, looking over and keenly appraising the human show.

"I am going back to New York," said Anne, giving him her hand. "I just can't endure it out here any longer. I had a letter from Ruth to-day and am to have a room in the same house with them."

"That's well enough for them,—but poor me!"

"Oh, you'll manage somehow," she smiled.

"Heard from John lately?"

"Yes; he thinks I am right to come to New York. There is not much chance for me here, and no one I really know well—except Vic," she

A GINGHAM ROSE

smiled. As she turned her face back so that the light fell on her strongly, Victor was shocked at the change in her.

"Odd, thinking of Ruth and the Man-eater married, isn't it?" he reflected absently.

"Are you doing anything for your cold?" she asked. "Come in to tea to-morrow and give an account of yourself; there are dozens of things I want to talk to you about."

"Thanks; four o'clock?"

"Yes; good night."

Anne twisted her glass about silently for a while after the door had closed on Victor. Silence never embarrassed her. "Strange, is it not," she queried, "how a certain type of big-hearted, addle-pated boy can sometimes sense a woman to the very heart of her?"

"That is, when the big boy loves the woman," suggested the man.

"But," she laughed, "prove your rule. How about it when she loves a man? Why does it not work both ways?"

"Maybe she is not addle-pated enough to know without thinking," he smiled.

"Or 'big-hearted' enough," she finished.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Besides," and he rested his arms on the table and watched her, amused, "does she ever, really, love a man?"

"She? Who? Eve, or—just me?" she asked half in earnest.

"Both one and the other, they being one and the same." He raised his shoulders and laughed, then luxuriously devoured an oyster. "Frankly, Miss Preston, I am sorry you are going away. You are never a responsibility and I am selfish enough to prefer that sort of woman. One meets her seldom enough. You see, you keep a man so pleasantly occupied with other things that he quite forgets to make love to you, and when he is no better than penniless there is rare tact in making him forget."

"I am poor as a church-mouse myself," she smiled. "I suppose it is really very stupid of me not to give some well provided young man time to think."

"Now, don't, don't talk like that!" The man's nervous face twitched with impatience. "I detest hearing women talk so. If you please, I can do enough of that for two."

"Stuff," said Anne, only half amused.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"You won't have to do that. Your work is good; if you will just slave and stand for the tumbles, you'll make it."

"I do hope so," said Anne, simply.

"Hope? Fallacy; don't waste time hoping. Work and pluck are the things; they count."

"One needs a very strong backbone," she sighed, looking a little tired of it all.

"Rather cuts women out of the game, of course," he said absently.

"I suppose so," she agreed, looking at her glass.

"There you go again. Supposing won't do either. You must keep still until you are sure, then go for the head of the nail. Do, do, do, is the way." The man brought his hand down heavily on the table. A big flat hand it was; a hand of deeds.

Anne quietly leaned over and laid her small, smooth palm beside his. He looked from the incongruous hands to her face, puzzling at the something in her eyes—eyes in which he had always found a sympathetic cynicism.

"Now, don't any more, to-night at least," she said quietly. "It may be childish, I know it is

A GINGHAM ROSE

womanish, but I can not endure that sort of talk to-night. You see I have been having lessons in 'doing' lately. Let's go home, please."

"Miss Preston, I'm so sorry. I have been such a brute. A man must say that sort of thing to himself to keep going, and I was babbling my own lesson aloud."

"You need not be sorry. Women know the plain truth as well as men, but," she smiled, "they can't always stand the sound of it."

"That is all very well, but it makes me no less a brute."

Anne wheeled about and looked him in the eyes; she was nearly savage in her intensity. "Be glad that you are a brute," she said brusquely. "It is just that God-sent brute quality that helps you men to succeed above and beyond us. Now," she laughed, "let me hear you say something more brutal than that."

The man's voice was gentle when he answered her. "I fancy that if tact and brutality got together like that oftener we'd all get along faster. It's a bigger combination, after all, than nerve and doing." He helped her into her coat.

"Speaking of tact," she smiled. She pulled

A GINGHAM ROSE

herself together to meet the storm and wind outside, in mood welcoming the struggle. As they reeled around a corner to their car she laughed in her old way. "Nothing like an actual fight with something to drive away the blue devils, is there?" she gasped, clinging to her hat. "Between you and the wind I'm feeling quite myself again."

"Better not try to talk in the wind," said the man from the depths of his collar.

CHAPTER III

A sound as of battle comes up from the sea.

—SWINBURNE.

John Warren was standing again by his bedroom window. It was another spring morning, but the boy had grown into the bigger sort of boy that sometimes deserves being called a man. Things about bespoke an artistic prosperity; there were green raw silk curtains at the windows now, and the scarlet geranium looked pampered. Because of the quality, the peculiar stolid delicacy of his work, he had promptly found his place in the professional world. There was luck in his finding it so soon. He had not changed since that other spring morning, except in intensity.

He was wondering if Anne and Catherine Gage would be, could be, the friends he wanted them to be. He had read somewhere,—he read a great deal; one finds things out in books without

A GINGHAM ROSE

asking,—that “taste is genius, and style is imitation,” and he saw the two girls so classified.

He knew well that, except as taste and style are certain to meet with tact, there would be little friendship and plenty of mental reservation. Anne had few girl or woman friends. Her heart had to be marched upon through her brain, and there was all the stubbornness of youth about her standard. Once her respect for “skill” was appealed to she gave freely, even too generously; but on that ground women seldom interested her.

John knew this better than any one and felt powerless; he wanted Anne’s companionship nearly as much as he wanted Catherine for his wife. Her appreciation, knowledge and enthusiasm meant much to him; her senses were finely keyed and her honesty was a tonic. His engagement to Catherine had established a firmer basis of friendship for them than ever before, and Anne had brain enough to hold the pose. But could he ever bring her to accept Catherine from his point of view? His mind traveled back to the first winter he had known Anne, and he laughed as he remembered what a prig he had been.

He turned away from the window to look at a

A GINGHAM ROSE

photograph of Catherine that stood on the shelf over the fireplace.

"It was just as well I was a prig," he said to the picture. "A little more and I'd have been in love with the youngster, and that might have delayed my finding you, dear girl." The well-groomed, clear-eyed health of Catherine attracted him; he believed in that sort of woman for a wife. Nearly all men do, and wisely. It is only once in a way that a man and a woman rise successfully above wisdom. The idea was not included in John's present scope; he was still a bewildered plodder in the land of conventions. But the plodder is likely to be thorough and seldom has work to do over. He learns well if slowly.

He went to his desk and took out a photograph of Anne and placed it beside Catherine's. The girl's eyes smiled mysteriously at him from the shadow of a big sophisticated hat and a mass of soft fur. "Well, Nancy, you have the 'spark,' whatever that means, and I hope you'll hit it off." He took the picture of Catherine in his big deft hands and looked at it affectionately. John was a student of looks as well as books.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, dear," he smiled, "we do not find Nancy a restful girl, do we? And we suspect she'll be driving some poor devil about crazy one of these days." He put them side by side again and stepped back with folded arms to enjoy his mastery of the situation, noticing with amusement how the shadow thrown upward from the shelf drew them together and wrapped them in a common tone. For the moment they were both his.

"We'd go crazy in this world, Nancy, except for the shadows," he laughed, and his eyes wandered a moment to a fine old Japanese print by Hokusai that hung above the photographs. "Have you ever thought it out, Nancy? The Japs don't put in the shadows at all, and yet, how mellow! What's the secret of that?" Again he glanced at Catherine. It was a good opportunity to practise tact. "You don't care a fig whether they put in the shadows or not, do you, dear?" Then he nodded at Anne. "I have thought it out for myself, young woman. The prints are all shadow and they leave out the glare. The clever little Japs!"

He glanced at the clock that had belonged to some one's grandfather, who had left no name

A GINGHAM ROSE

to the posterity of the pawnshop. Anne was coming at one o'clock to pose for the pictures of an old-time story he was illustrating. The girl's fine head, quantity of smooth hair and sloping shoulders made any model he knew seem tame and stupid by comparison, and with a twinge of conscience he had asked her to pose for him. It was almost time for her to come.

He went into the studio and got out the costume she was to pose in. He stood smoothing the old silk and looking out of the window. The day was sharp and his eyes caught too much for comfort. Great masses of loose cloud, harmless and feathery, were dotted over the sky, and the black smoke from a tall factory chimney strutted shamelessly across the face of the blue and white deep. The commercial element that everywhere dominated the sky-line reflected something from within himself, and impatiently he pulled the curtains. The light from the sky-window was enough, was better; he did not want his head befogged now; he had work to do. To believe in "one thing at a time" is sane and admirable; to live it, unusual! A tap at the door and there stood Anne, her face bright with the fresh spirit

A GINGHAM ROSE

of out-of-doors that clung to her as if it could not give her up.

"You gipsy!" said John. "You look like your old photograph to-day, Nancy. I have just been having a talk with it."

"That old thing? I am certain it went into the waste-basket ages ago!"

"Come and see for yourself," and John led the way into the little room off the studio.

"This is—Catherine?" Anne stood absorbing the likeness by the side of her own.

"Yes; and, Anne, I do want you to like her."

She looked at him over her shoulder with a laugh on her mouth and scorn in her eyes.

"But I won't. You know very well, John, that we have absolutely nothing in common." She deliberately set the two pictures as far apart as the length of the shelf would permit. "There," she laughed, "they are safer so! That precious little green vase might otherwise get its neck broken." Then she let her hands hang limp at her sides and turned her eyes slowly about the room. A long expected and much dreaded occasion had arrived and been dealt with, and she felt tired. The girl was what she had supposed; just

A GINGHAM ROSE

the same it made her heart-sick. "This is your room, John?" There was cynicism lurking even in the poise of her head.

"You think it—nice?" he questioned. He spoke, thoughtlessly thankful, only to get her off the subject of the photographs and their unfortunate proximity.

"Why, yes." She shrugged her shoulders. "Nice—that is just what it is. Haven't you outgrown that word yet, John? I suppose"—and again she swept her eyes about the room—"it is the sort of room you believe in having."

"I—don't understand, Anne," he said, uneasily stiff.

"Well, for the matter of that, neither do I!" she laughed.

"Anne, you used to get angry with me at nothing; once in particular, I remember—"

She turned on him in a moment.

"So, you remember, do you? Well, I do not need to be reminded, I assure you. It is amazing that you should remember a thing so trifling if it meant nothing."

"You know very well I meant nothing, but— isn't it my turn now?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Perhaps it is, John," she said slowly, and her eyes turned toward the window holding the something like mist that tells of thoughts traveling backward. "You called me a 'gingham rose,' did you not? Well, it was at least an unkindness prettily turned." She took him into her gaze in an odd, half-seeing way. "And," she smiled, "I have just dared to suggest darkly that you are something of a fraud. I even venture to add the prediction that you'll like it less than I do when you find it out for yourself. And, John, in time we'll both know whether we are real prophets and seers. But," she added with sudden lightness, "this isn't posing, is it?"

John did not feel sure; but the girl was compelling, dominating, and after a thought he decided it was safer to fall in with her mood. He took refuge in his work and let her become to him as a tool, forced himself to think of her as he did of his canvas or his brushes, or, to be more just, the old silk dress he had found for the pose. He loved an old fabric.

"Come and have a look at the dress, Anne. Beautiful, is it not?"

"Lovely!" Anne passed her hand reverently

A GINGHAM ROSE

over the silvery stuff. "A piece of old silk, John, or a steam-engine, fills me with awe," she said, and her laugh was in gentle tune with the rustling silk. The dress was a gray taffeta patterned over with tiny pink and green rosebuds.

"There are pins and a comb and things," said John. "Do your hair low, please, parted, you know. I'll go outside and leave you the place to rig up in."

"All right," said Anne, briskly taking a pin out of her neck ribbon. She was secretly biting her tongue for having led her into temper. "I'll whistle 'when.'"

John shut the door and walked up and down the hall with a cigarette, trying to ponder out what the strange girl meant about his room, about him, and wishing profoundly that she would get over the habit of only half saying things. Then a bar of *Johnny comes marching home* was whistled over the transom and he hurried in, forgetting, in his keen delight with the way Anne and the costume suited each other, to shut the door behind him.

She stood before the mirror trying to hook the skirtband. "Great, isn't it?" she mumbled over

A GINGHAM ROSE

her shoulder with a pin in her mouth. "But it was made for a slimmer person than I, and I'm afraid of bursting out the shoulders. Do you suppose you could hook that for me?"

"Take that pin out of your mouth," said John, getting down on his knees. He pulled and tugged for all he was worth. "How under the sun do you women stand such things? I didn't know there was so much of you," he laughed.

"Goodness, Johnny," she gasped, "you are sawing me in two. Now wait a second and I'll hold my breath. One, two, three!" she laughed.

"John!" cried an amazed voice from the forgotten doorway; and there, with a severe, middle-aged woman, in cut jet and black-spotted velvet, looking undisguised horror over her shoulder, stood the girl of the photograph, Catherine. The girl was beautifully dressed in much embroidered light gray, and she held her skirts out of the dust with her white-gloved hands.

"Catherine!" gasped John, getting awkwardly to his feet and going quickly to the door. "Why didn't you let me know? Mrs. Tyler, I'm *awfully* glad to see you. Catherine, Anne, Miss Gage and Mrs. Tyler, I want you to meet

A GINGHAM ROSE

my friend, Miss Preston. You know"—and John laughed nervously—"you really surprised me!"

"Apparently," responded Mrs. Tyler in a voice below zero.

Anne's mind worked in flashes. One flash told her that John was not master of his own situation; another, that of the two she would pity Catherine more than John in the end. She saw that Catherine, if a little dull, was at least sincere. The other flash announced to her a complete antagonism between herself and Mrs. Tyler. "I am so glad you came just then, Miss Gage," she smiled, and in his heart John gave thanks. "You see," she hurried on, "you can help me into this old dress. I am posing for John, you know. He was doing his best, but men are awkward. Isn't it a delicious silk, Mrs. Tyler? One does not find such silks in the shops nowadays."

"I think," said Mrs. Tyler, remotely, as if from a snow-capped mountain of virtue wrapped in a cloud of family pride, "that I have not been aware of a noticeable change in the make of silk in my day."

A GINGHAM ROSE

For a moment John felt as if he had been plunged into ice-water. He thought Anne was going to laugh. And so did Anne, but she struggled bravely for his sake. She let her eyes gleam into his for one moment, then, with a sweetness rather too sweet, she said:

"Of course not. I had heard of you as Miss Gage's aunt, and the word is so misleading, and in the shadow of the doorway, you know, I could not see for myself."

Catherine stood for an absent moment pulling off her gloves, then she helped Anne fasten the skirt, while Mrs. Tyler, in a low but carefully audible voice, talked with John and observed Anne from top to toe through her lorgnette.

"It was Catherine, I assure you, who was possessed of the absurd idea of 'surprising' you. She is very young and knows next to nothing of men. What do you pay your models? She is very pretty."

The color flew to John's face, but his eyes implored Anne's patience.

"If there were models to be found half as interesting as Miss Preston, there would be no occasion to impose on her friendship," he said loy-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ally. Anne's responsive color thanked him. For a moment they were one in sympathy. A man never loves a woman so well as when he has been able to come to her rescue.

Anne beamed on Catherine. John's generosity had helped her back to her own. It even put her in a mood to be amused with the crotchets of Mrs. Tyler.

"I almost wish they'd wear dresses like these again. They are so pretty."

Catherine felt baffled. The situation defied her; she felt thrust aside, as if she had no part. She felt too often as if she had been thrust aside from understanding John and his work. But she had a kind of dignity, very gentle, too; so, when John began clearing portfolios and draperies off the chairs for them, she smiled and shook her head at him.

"No, John, not now. We came in just to ask you to dine with us. Auntie has a lot of shopping to do. You'll come?"

"Of course," said John, enthusiastically. Mrs. Tyler smiled. "Then we'll see something at the theater. Mrs. Fiske has a new play."

Mrs. Tyler raised her hands in protest. "Pd

A GINGHAM ROSE

rather see something diverting. I do not approve of these problem plays."

"But," said Anne, with rising color, "she is so artistic." Mrs. Fiske was one of the people she believed in, and when Anne believed she was thorough about it.

Mrs. Tyler paused patiently, as if she must endure with Christian grace something deplorable and unavoidable.

"It is scarcely necessary to go to the theaters in order to be harrowed in these extraordinary days," she murmured in a padded voice.

"Oh, of course," responded Anne, with sympathy. "If one is out of sorts or upset about something—perhaps; Mrs. Fiske does not aim to be a rest-cure."

"We dine promptly," said Mrs. Tyler, fixing her eyes on John, as he walked with them to the elevator.

John heard himself say "thank you" or something equally imbecile, as the elevator descended. He stood with his face against the cool iron netting for a moment before going back to the studio to face Anne. He realized how uncertain

A GINGHAM ROSE

a thing is peace as long as the women a man knows are young enough to be experimental. He found Anne wrapped in a studied composure and he saw with apprehension the laughter struggling back of her eyes.

"A horrible old woman, John," she said frankly. "I am sorry I nettled her, because, of course, she will take it out on you. There are a few things that irritate me, and stupidity about Mrs. Fiske is one of them. Poor John, I suppose you marry her too?"

"Not much," said John, emphatically. "She is a conventional old tea-drinker, and that is a fact, and she just didn't understand you. She has grown up on a farm and has money enough to keep a wall around her. That's all."

Anne winced but made no reply. Then they tried poses until the right one was found and John went to work. The time flew by, for him at least.

"Johnny?"

"Nancy?"

"Isn't it getting rather late?"

"Tired?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"No, but," she mimicked, "'we dine promptly!'"

"Oh, chuck it," groaned John. "Let me work ten minutes more. That won't hurt any one. I don't care if it does."

She smiled and held her pose.

"Will you come again on Thursday?" he asked.

"If you will promise to keep the door shut."

John put aside his brushes and palette and came over by the girl's chair.

"See here, kid," he said slowly, "it is a trifle awkward, but you know without being told that I wanted to hit something before that old shrew got through talking. But, Nancy, Catherine is different, and I want to put up with things for her sake."

"Well," she responded, looking up at him with earnestness in her eyes, "you are right to do that, of course. But the question is, John, how much putting up with things are you going to stand? Catherine seems a sweet girl; for my part, I like more pepper. But once you get her away from that old tyrant she will, no doubt, make an affable wife."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I think so," said John; and Anne promptly astonished him by laughing.

"Dear John, you are as good as done for," she sighed. "Any one could see that! Why, you blessed goose, don't you know that Aunt Agatha Tyler will never consent to be left behind? She will come to live with you!" She considered him solemnly. "Always the fattest lamb to the sacrifice!"

"You are very—sympathetic," said John, bitterly. He hated ridicule.

Anne got out of her chair and stood before him, her eyes peering into his. "Do you feel like that about it, John?"

He bit his lip and turned away. "I'll go outside while you change your dress," he said. Again he paced the hall with more to think about. He almost wished Anne had stayed out west. She ruffled him, upset his purpose, and disturbed his creed of life uncomfortably. She was troublesome. When she whistled again he found her pinning on her hat and smiling at him serenely in the glass.

"You are a funny sort of girl," he commented absently.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"No!" said Anne, with wide-eyed incredulity.

As she gave him her hand at the door, John looked at her seriously. Mrs. Tyler and her point of view had shown him clearly how absolutely alone and "impossible" to her sort Anne was. He wanted to help her, and he felt it could be done somehow without hurting him. He had no idea of giving Anne up, but she must not conflict with other things as important.

"You would tell me, Nancy, if there was anything I could do to help you—in your work, you know."

Her eyes narrowed a moment, then she laughed.

"Dear, dear, John!" she sighed with assumed tragedy. "Any one could see that you are preparing either for the grave or matrimony."

"But"—and John's weariness was ill-concealed—"I am not; not for ever so long."

"That," said the girl with conviction, "is a great mistake. The younger, the prettier, you know. Besides, think of it! you'll never be able to call down that old woman properly, till you are safely married. I thirst to see fair play!"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Thursday at one, then?" John's eyes looked tired.

The girl impulsively turned.

"I've been anything but 'nice' this afternoon, John. I know it as well as Mrs. Tyler. I hate being 'nice.' But I'm awfully sorry—for you!" she finished with an exasperating chuckle.

"I'm not in need of sympathy," said John, proudly.

"You just tell that to your grandmother!" said Anne. "Good night," and she was gone.

"Good night," echoed John, and he stumbled over a piece of drapery. He kicked it aside furiously, then stood looking at it. He hated temper, or the look of it. He stopped, picked up the bit of tapestry, folded it and laid it away in a chest, then deliberately dressed for dinner,—for dinner and Catherine's aunt.

CHAPTER IV

Crush that life, and behold its wine running.

—BROWNING.

Anne and Ruth,—Ruth was now Mrs. Man-eater or Mrs. Rathburn, according to Anne's mood,—had finished their breakfast slowly, waiting for the postman. Ruth in her new happiness was prettier than ever; especially since she had Anne back again, it seemed to her that life had little more to give.

"Oh, dear," sighed Anne, and there was a note of fright in the sigh; "there he is and with my story back again! The manila package, I'd know it anywhere; I can feel it!"

The package held Anne's first long story. She had published several short ones, but they meant little to her. The long one had traveled far and to no apparent purpose except the piling up of a little heap of slips—"The editor regrets—" The heap was small, after all, but no mole-hill ever wore the mask of a mountain more stubbornly.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I wonder, Ruth," the girl said slowly, "if I am a failure? Do you realize what that means? Nearly all 'artistic' women do fail in anything that really counts. They end just hacks. I suppose I am 'artistic' beyond a doubt; that is the trouble. Everything is in favor of my being a beautiful failure. I never saw myself before." She held the package off at arm's length and looked at it with horror. "Perhaps I have been blind, Ruth. Perhaps the story is an ugly, misshapen thing after all. Perhaps I've looked at it so long that I don't really see it."

"Anne, dear, don't talk so, please don't." Ruth caught the girl's hand. "You are not fair to yourself; you know you are not. All the really good things have a bad time finding a publisher; you know that is so."

"And all the really bad things, too, Ruth. Only," she smiled, "unless one has done them, one never hears of them." The two girls stood looking a dumb moment into each other's blue eyes.

"It's a beautiful story," faltered Ruth, lowering her eyes first.

"I wish I knew that," said Anne. "But, girlye,

A GINGHAM ROSE

the opinion of a friend isn't worth a cent. The overworked, tyrant editor with his burglar-proof, fire-proof heart is the one that counts. He hasn't time to read between the lines, you see. That's the secret of the bad books: they are all good enough, between the lines!"

Ruth felt hurt and uncertain what to do. Anne had lately, since the work had come to be serious with her, seemed so far out of her reach. She felt unable to follow the girl through her troubles. She seemed to resent her help. Anne understood well enough and valued Ruth's sympathy, but, young as she was, she had learned that the dark places have to be lighted by self-conviction and the steep places climbed with self-found strength. She held up her head and smiled. If Ruth was weak, she must be strong.

"Now, Ruth, don't be blue; one of us at a time is enough. The truth of the matter is that the book is so close a signal from the land of the truly wonderful that the tyrants are afraid. They do not find in it a familiar; it is not just after the pattern of the ninety and nine. You see, our conceit is not extinguished." Anne laughed, and Ruth wished in her soul she would

A GINGHAM ROSE

not do it again; not in that way. "Oh, you'll be glad to know me some day, Mrs. Man-eater." She held the story close in her folded arms and looked down on the girl with mock majesty. "That is, if you have great patience, and I can find meal-tickets with which to bridge the gap."

Ruth's eyes filled.

"It is not fair to us to talk that way, Nancy. You know very well that as long as we have a thing in the world there can be no gap for you to bridge."

Anne flung her arm around the girl's shoulders and her own eyes were bright.

"Come along upstairs," she said gently, as if Ruth were the one, after all, in need of sympathy. "We'll put the thing away and let it simmer for ever so long, then some day when we have learned a thing or two we'll get it out, and burn the editor in effigy, and do it all over again. The story is all right, of course; I'd like to hear any one say it isn't, but it's too big for me. I've been having a bad attack of self-overestimation and this—bleeding," she sighed, "—will clear my head of the vapors."

A GINGHAM ROSE

When they got to her room she pulled a box out from under her couch and put the package under all the papers and letters, just as it was, without breaking the string. "Will you sing a dirge?" she asked, looking up solemnly at Ruth, who laughed, though her eyes were wet. "There, it is buried, 'slip and all.' The very sight of another of those bits of paper would turn my heart wrong side out, I know it would. Now, Miss Ruth, we are going to be very meek and attend to the pots and pans, till we have earned our way to the library."

Ruth rejoiced to see the inborn grit of the girl come so certainly to the surface, and she left her feeling sure that, for this time at least, the worst of it was past. She was at the stage of housekeeping where she insisted on dusting her wedding presents herself, and as she went daintily about she wished in her heart that Anne would get married. Certainly it was the only thing for a girl to do, and, as she sought out the dust, the sunshine pouring in the windows in a flood of gold and shining on her yellow hair, her heart trilled like a canary in a golden cage.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne came down to lunch with her hat on. She seemed to hide in its shadow, but Ruth saw that her eyes looked tired.

"I am going out, Ruth. I think I shall go up and have a talk with John. I want to see some good work, for a tonic. Isn't it stifling? More like August than June, isn't it? When do you two go away?"

The Man-eater looked at Anne quizzically. "Now, do not dare say, young woman, that you are not going with us," and he knew by the quick pressure of his hand under the tablecloth that he had said the right thing to please Ruth.

"You know very well, Nancy, that you need the change," Ruth added quickly.

"Yes," laughed Anne, and there was something made-up and metallic in the ring of the laugh, "I need the change; that is just what I do need." She shuddered. It cost her a pang to say something jarring.

"Now, Nancy," the two began, but she stopped them proudly. "I should not have said that. It's cowardly, pretty nearly boastful, to make things out worse than they are. But I can not well afford to go; it is very reasonable

A GINGHAM ROSE

here and not at all uncomfortable. Please don't make it harder for me. Thousands of people do stay in town in the summer, you know, and there is no special reason why I should be pampered. I shall get to know the city in summer-time, you see, and shall turn it to copy if not to account. Possibly I'll be a little late for dinner to-night, but don't wait for me. I'll come right down." She had eaten almost nothing.

"What *are* we to do with her?" said Ruth, hopelessly, after Anne had left the house.

"Let her be, dear," said the Man-eater. "She has to find things out for herself."

"But I know she is lonely, and it hurts me."

"Well," sighed the man, with a wondering look at Ruth, "every one is lonely, except you and me."

She smiled up at him and wished with all her might a like fate for Anne. In that she reached the limit of her generosity.

Anne sauntered absently over to the elevated station. She had never in her life felt so tired, so wilted, so hopeless, and so curiously indifferent. She felt as numb as a leaf on the wind. She stopped at the foot of the elevated stairway,

A GINGHAM ROSE

caught by a clever poster. She did not notice the gay thing for itself, but stood wondering at its trick of line until brought to herself by a conscious laugh from a young man, who was being led rapidly through life at the end of a cigarette which, like some sacred lamp, seemed never to go out. It occurred to her that life wasn't much above advertising, after all.

She shut her eyes as she moved up the stairs. The glare hurt so; she wondered if she were going to be ill. She was top-heavy and her hand shook. But it would not be so bad to be just ill enough to be forced to lie in bed a whole week, to lie still and not think.

Her foot touched something soft and she jumped back startled. It was a gray leather pocketbook. She opened it, smiling at the conscience-problem as she counted over the money,—almost five dollars. She looked down on the busy street, letting her eyes follow the carts and wagons; everything was going, pretend as it would, after something to eat: the clang of the surface cars, the jar and rumble of the trains passing overhead, the various horrors one's ears must endure,—all that people might be fed.

A GINGHAM ROSE

It was wonderful, too, when one really thought about it, how much might be done with almost five dollars. But perhaps the ticket-man up at the window needed it more than she did. The thought possessed her and she ran up quickly and thrust it through the window.

"I found that on the stairs," she explained. "No doubt it will be called for." She looked into the eyes of the pale young man and decided that he did need it more than she did, and she hoped he'd squander it and have a good time. As she was deliberately tempting him the fault was hers, and she concluded with a mental shrug that she could stand the responsibility.

"Thank you, no doubt the owner will call," said the ticket-man, fingering the purse questioningly.

"Almost five dollars," said Anne, glancing at his hand.

"Shall I take your name?" he asked hurriedly, covering his confusion with routine.

She took her ticket and carefully emptied her change into her own pocketbook. "No, thank you. I don't care about rewards."

She hurried into her car and sat quiet with her

A GINGHAM ROSE

hands idle in her lap. Her fresh wash dress and smooth hair and look of outward coolness, in contrast with the storm back of her eyes, made an interesting problem for the philosopher that one may never escape on the trains. She did what little shopping she had to do and was amused to see how many things were to be had for a little less than five dollars. But none of them compared with the good time the ticket-man and his girl would have with the money. Of course, every ticket-man must have a girl, and she fancied how they would take a boat and go down to Coney Island for the day, and she smiled to catch herself looking up at the sky and hoping that Sunday would be fine. Then she remembered that ticket-men work on Sunday, too, and gave it up. She went around to see John.

At sight of his door she stood still. Just why had she come? "Can I tell him about the story; that I am a failure?" she asked herself. "I came for that; I think I did." She sighed again and it seemed to her she would suffocate if she did not talk things over with some one who understood. "One can not go on living inside for ever." Even as she let the knocker fall back she laughed at

A GINGHAM ROSE

herself; she knew very well she would tell him nothing about it. "But, why have I come? What will he think?" Her hands went up to her head as she heard a chair pushed back and a commotion inside. "Perhaps," she laughed, "if I just keep still he'll tell me why. It sometimes happens like that." The door was opened just a crack and a tall slice of John, minus coat and collar, became visible.

"It's only me," she said, less grammatical than eager. "Are you too busy to let me in?"

"Wait just a minute, will you?" and John disappeared.

"Truly, John, it doesn't matter. I didn't come for anything in particular."

"But it does matter," called John. "Awfully glad to see you. You can tell me about this thing I am doing. I say, Nancy, do you care if I leave off my collar and coat?"

"Not a bit, Johnny. It is sizzling hot."

"It isn't that, bless you," said John. "I was out in the country yesterday with some other fellows, and the heat and the water got the better of us; we stayed in too long. I think my back is all coming off." Then John opened the

A GINGHAM ROSE

door wide and gave his hand to Anne. She wondered then that she had ever dreamed of telling him anything about her troubles. One is chary of speaking of one's failures to a big, brawny, successful young man.

"We'll have to make up for the lack of costume with extra ceremony," he laughed, and led her by the hand to a big throne chair by the window. He pulled the long pins out of her hat with an assurance that was not to be contradicted, then raised the hat to the ceiling on the tip of a curtain pole, and, after balancing it around the room, he fixed it with nice skill upon a nail out of reach. "Now, then," he laughed, "you can't go home till I say you may."

"You do even the little every-day things—differently," she smiled, leaning her head back in the deep chair and watching him lazily.

"What do you think of this drawing, Nancy?" he asked, pulling the easel about so that she could see without moving.

"Oh, dear me, how charming!"

"Now you have done your duty, let's have the cold truth."

"But, John, that is what I think." She looked

A GINGHAM ROSE

at him curiously and with reproof. She had always scolded him ever since she had known him, and her advice sometimes provoked him and sometimes amused. "Why do you always run your work down? If you have the common gumption to do it, you must have the common sense to see that it is good. It may be sincere, but it doesn't sound so."

John's face flushed beneath the sunburn. "Isn't it rather hot for moralizing?" he asked satirically.

"It's nothing but backhanded boasting," she persisted solemnly.

"You are very frank, Anne."

"I know it," she sighed. "It's my besetting sin. But I am right about it."

John picked up a pencil and carefully trailed it over a line or two of the drawing. She angered him to-day, but he had no idea of letting her know it. She was worth the discomfort of her honesty. He wondered why, after all, he took things from her that he wouldn't have said to himself.

"You see, John, it's so dangerous. Some day you may find some one who is idiot enough to

A GINGHAM ROSE

believe you." He did not answer and she sat watching him idly. It was very close and still up there. She forgot what they had been talking about in a moment and thought only of how strong he looked in his loose white shirt, how fine his throat was, and she wondered, half-amused, if he had really burned his back at all. The shirt was made like the traditional dueling shirt that is so dear to the heart of the matinée girl. Something, she did not know what, made her color rise and she turned her eyes quickly toward the window, letting them follow the black streak of factory smoke that seemed to flow across the sky so easily.

"I'd like to break into smoke like that," she sighed.

John stood by the window with his arms folded. "Maybe you will, one of these days, kid, but you've got to go through the coal-hole and the furnace first."

Again she flushed. John did not often say such things, but when he did she never forgot. Her eyes moved with the smoke, fascinated, watching to see how it changed as it reeled by his tall silhouette. She felt dizzy and faint and

A GINGHAM ROSE

wondered again if she were going to be ill. Everything inside and outside seemed to be dissolving, like the tossing smoke out there, not violently, but inevitably.

"Did you come in for anything in particular?" John asked after a while. She did not answer and he turned quickly. The girl sat, white and wide-eyed, looking straight before her as if dazed.

"Nancy," he cried, bending over her, "are you ill?"

"Why—no," she said doubtfully, putting her hands to her head, "I don't think I am. The smoke rushing by out there made me dizzy. I'll just sit still a little while, please."

John made her swallow some brandy and stood looking down on her with his back to the window.

"Nancy," and he patted the back of her hand awkwardly, "you are a difficult youngster, sometimes. You are hard to find, do you know it? Were you well when you came up to-day? Did you come for some reason? I believe you are working too hard; but you are so confoundedly reticent about your work. Tell me!"

A GINGHAM ROSE

She had shut her eyes tight when he began talking. Her tired mind seemed to lose grip of anything tangible, but her hungry heart drank in his sympathy like the thirsty flower it was. Intuition told her she must pull herself together; John had asked her something. She opened her eyes wide and smiled at him. It made no difference what he had asked, after all. She felt absurdly happy because she had roused him, had gained the comfort she needed so, without telling him anything. What was the use of talking? Then the drollery crept into her eyes again.

"You look awfully well standing against the sky like that," she said.

John laughed and collapsed to the floor, sitting Turkish-fashion at her feet.

"Where are you going this summer?" he asked. "Go to a place near by, so I can run over to see you Sundays now and then."

"You won't have far to run," she smiled.

"That's good, but where?"

"Don't you know my address?" she asked with mock surprise.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, child alive, you are not well now; you need to get away."

"I can't afford going away, Johnny, so there is no use talking about it."

"Now, see here, kid,"—and he paused, not knowing just how to go on.

"John," and there was great severity in her tone and a twinkle in her eyes, "how long is it since you have been to Vermont?"

"March," said John, carefully extracting a pin from a crack in the floor.

"How was that horrible old woman?"

"Holding her own," smiled John.

"Do you really believe all that is going to make you much better off?"

"Isn't that rather a cool way of looking at things?"

"When is it to be?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said brusklly. "How often must I tell you that? You know I work slowly. I can't save up very fast."

Anne rose suddenly. She felt weak and stood with her hands on the arms of her chair.

"I hope with all my heart that something will

A GINGHAM ROSE

happen to save the two of you. I suppose it is so, that happiness is always just one step higher, no matter what one comes to. But the more I know people who paint and write, the more do I think that they'd better let marrying be, till they have arrived, at least. I'd be a tempest in a teapot, I know, if any one interfered with me, and you'll be worse than I should, because you are selfish. Men all are, Johnny; especially you. That is why we like you, maybe," she smiled. "Get my hat down, please. It is growing late; see the pink light on the smoke?"

John's protest was earnest. Scold as she might, he liked talking with her. Then he got down the hat, but very slowly.

"Now, Miss Missionary, sit here before the glass and let an unworthy heathen slave pin it on for you. I know very well how it is done!"

"A wise man is an engaged man," she smiled.

"How's that?" and he stood before her peering down into her face to see if the hat was straight.

Anne drew back with a little hysterical gasp. "John," she asked, "did you ever sit in church just behind a bald-headed man with a fly crawl-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ing over his head and feel that you'd die if you might not brush it off?"

"Why, no," he said, looking at her with a mixture of anxiety and amusement, "I don't think I ever did."

"But you should, John," she smiled wearily. "It would round out your experience wonderfully."

"What are you talking about, kid?" he laughed.

"How should I know?" she questioned. "Coming to see me soon?"

"Of course. When do the others go away?"

"Next week."

"I'll tell you a scheme, Nancy. Every Sunday that we are both in town we'll take a ride, car or boat, and find our supper somewhere along the way."

"Lovely," said Anne. "But—Aunt Agatha?"

"There you go again," groaned John.

"Very well," she said. "But remember, it is your idea."

"I'm responsible," he laughed. "We'll go a week from to-morrow, first. It's always cool enough up here, so you come by as early as you

A GINGHAM ROSE

like and we'll read or talk till we want to go. And, I say, Nancy, don't fix up. Let's forget how horribly old we are getting and just go in for a good time."

Anne was standing by the window, the warm, early evening air blowing across her face.

"Can you realize, John, that this is the last day of June?"

"'Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
In the air now soft with a summer to be,'"

she quoted softly. "We must go up to the park now and then?"

"Oh yes, of course; but later on, when people are out of town and we can feel as if we owned it."

Then Anne, with something singing in her heart and all her senses blinded, went down into the street. As she walked through the cross-town street she met, face to face, the shop-girls pouring out the back doors of the big shops. One look into the tense, tired eyes reminded her with a shock just why she had gone to see John. Unless she earned some money soon she'd have to work all day, stupidly, too.

CHAPTER V

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempt rain and hail and thunder.

—BROWNING.

Springtime's pale blossoms were fast turning into fruit, the world was taking on a glow like mellow wine and in the sunsets was promise of a scarlet autumn. It was a Sunday afternoon and the last Sunday in July; Anne and John were going to the park for supper. The deserted city streets were draped in iridescent heat, nature playing with her gauze drop-curtains and caring not a jot that she had no audience.

Anne put on a dress of tan batiste, with trim black satin about her waist and throat. Her brown young arms and face gave color to the cool tone of her dress. She coiled her hair about her head in a flat mass of smooth braids and put on a big, light hat of black, topped with a garden of blue corn-flowers that somehow failed to get the better of her blue eyes. She peered through her drawn blinds at the hot, glaring

A GINGHAM ROSE

pavement below and sighed to think of John's cool, shadowy studio; it seemed so far to go. But her eyes grew bright with the thought of evening in the deep, green park. A quick glance at the clock told her she was late, and tucking her latch-key in her belt she hurried downstairs. Heat is endurable if one's eyes are fixed on something cool beyond.

What wonderful friends they were, Anne and John; what rare summer afternoons they had had together! And always there was a strange, fascinating sense of insecurity, each aware of it self-accusingly. As she hurried over to her car she wondered, with a sigh, why she had spent such a lot of time dressing up for somebody who was in love with somebody else. Something other than the heat burned over her face a deep flush.

"Mighty fashionable!" said John, folding his arms and blocking his studio door when Anne knocked and stood there, pretending to be all out of breath. "I have half a mind to send you home without your supper. You are late, do you know it?"

"Oh yes, I know it," said the girl, bravado

A GINGHAM ROSE

brimming over her eyes. "I'd something better to do, maybe."

"Don't believe a word of it. You've been doing your hair and dressing up; any one could tell that. Goodness me, what a swagger chick we are!"

"I think so, too," she answered, strutting across the studio with a great air. She paused before the empty fireplace and with an amused, half earnest look at John over her shoulder she shivered theatrically and spread her hands to an imaginary blaze. "A very cold day, Jonathan. Seems to me you'd be having a fire!" She stood poised between gaiety and seriousness. "Something really uncomfortable about a fireplace in summer-time, is there not?" she queried.

"You are more than clever, Miss Nancy, at the soothing art of changing the subject."

"But, Johnny—they *are* uncomfortable looking." She put her head on one side and observed the chimney-corner critically. "Looks like a ring with a stone lost out," she added.

"It looks—useless," admitted John, letting her mood lead as it liked.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Useless!" she echoed severely. "Worse than that, Johnny. It looks ugly."

"Worse?" smiled John, raising his brows to the moral plane.

"I think so," she said profoundly, never so happy as when she could only guess at what she was talking about. Modern and altogether feminine was Nancy.

"Well, Miss Philosophy, summers are short."

"Perhaps," Anne made a face, "when one is engaged to the pretty niece of her Aunt Agatha."

"See here, Nancy," and John's mouth set in the sort of line that tells of having thought something out to a definite end. "That has about reached a point of 'damnable reiteration.'"

She looked at him and laughed again. "Cross-patch!" But her lightly poised lines had unconsciously taken on direction, and turning from the fireplace she faced him squarely. Her laugh stayed to make light of what she knew was heavy enough. "Johnny, you are not properly in love!"

John stood for a moment with his back to her

A GINGHAM ROSE

and his arm on the shelf over the fireplace, then turned slowly and looked at her.

"Are you not forgetting yourself?" he asked. He was determined to stand no more of her opinions about his affairs.

"I?" she questioned, wide-eyed. "What have I to do with it?" She paused and the serious mood seemed to hover over her face. They were like butterflies, her moods, and fluttered near, but seldom settled upon her. "Don't misunderstand me, Johnny. I like Catherine Gage; I even think she will have a great deal more to get used to than you will. Poor girl!" she smiled. "She is cut out to be the usual wife, but you? John, you are not usual and you can't be, though you lash and prune yourself till you bleed to death. I know you. I do hate to see you make a mess of things. If you'd just be yourself you'd be so much nicer."

"You are flattering," said John, sarcastically.

"Dear, no," protested the girl; "I couldn't be that if I tried. But you know very well, John, that she does not care for your work and she wonders why you don't do fashion-plates with

A GINGHAM ROSE

funny perspectives and bewitching young men. Oh, John, I've no patience with you. You are so blind."

"I think, Anne, that I am able to attend to my own affairs," he said testily.

"You are mistaken about that, John." She looked at him with a mock solemnity that made him laugh, but not for several moons after it was said. He was too angry to see, and he felt in a fury that he must endure all this because a woman was speaking.

"All the little things you care so much about and that are so necessary for your work," she went on, as if she were thinking the thing out almost impersonally, "she will be so blind about. They will irritate you almost to despair; and the sad thing is that they are things she can't help; she can never understand; she hasn't the brain. Her brain is another sort. It comprehends gilt-legged furniture and flowered wall-hangings. She'll goad you to work faster and faster, perhaps for an expensive but becoming hat, Johnny. The useless stupidity of the sacrifice!" She sighed with her eyes on the fireplace. She took

A GINGHAM ROSE

off her own hat and held it on a finger-tip like a juggler.

"You have no idea, Johnny, what the Cath-
erines in this world pay for their hats. You
are in the rapt stage where you are blind to
prices. John," she threw the hat aside and
looked him straight in the eyes, "I simply can
not abide the possibility of your not coming into
the best you are capable of in your work. If
you go on with this thing you'll end hopelessly
by breaking your own heart and Catherine's, too.
She's in love with success, not with you. She
can't be in love with you; she can't understand
you; you are as good as strangers!"

"Anne Preston," and John's tense hands and
face told that he was roused in earnest, "if you
were a man I'd knock you down!"

The girl recoiled as if he had struck her; her
eyes filled and her mouth quivered, but in a mo-
ment she repossessed herself and stood to her
inches, looking him back bravely. "I care so
much, John, and I am so sure that I am right that
I don't mind seeming rather a coward in taking
advantage of being a woman. Besides," and

A GINGHAM ROSE

she laughed whimsically, "being knocked down is not the worst thing in the world!"

His nerves tingled under the reproof and his hands relaxed. Then an idea took hold of him and he watched her as if fascinated. "Anne," he said in a low voice, moving toward her, "why do you care like that?"

The girl locked her hands tight and returned his look steadily.

"You have not answered me, John Warren. If Catherine Gage were an obscure girl,—and that is what she would be, stripped of her good clothes and her manners,—would you still want her for your wife? Think, John; for your own sake you must think."

"You women are cruel to one another," he retorted with a laugh, but he turned his eyes away.

Anne's hands went up to her throat. She realized what she had been saying and she was terrified. But above the terror she had seen something. He had looked away, he had evaded an answer. The crowded, jarring, wonderful moment crushed her and gave her back her life all at once. "John," she urged in a broken voice, "you must not do this thing. You know it must

A GINGHAM ROSE

end as I have said. You can't be more shocked at all this than I am. I did not mean to say it; but I am glad that I have."

John turned away from her brusklly. "Put on your hat, Anne. We must get out of this; we need sunshine. Come."

Anne glanced in a mirror as she fastened on her hat. Two bright spots were burning in her cheeks and something unconquerable back of her eyes was making them gleam.

"Becoming to me, getting excited, isn't it?" she laughed, feeling for the old careless ground; but the laugh reeled and tottered, for the careless ground was nearly passed.

"Everything is becoming to you, Anne," sighed John. "But that does not particularly help me."

CHAPTER VI

The forests had done it; there they stood;
We had caught for a moment the powers at play:
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done—we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

—BROWNING.

They walked over to the car without speaking, the late afternoon air pressing in on John's brain, while Anne's feet seemed scarcely to touch earth. Something, she dared not even whisper to herself what it was, had been revealed to her, and she knew by the tingling of her blood and the beauty of the day that nothing else was of any consequence. She was absurdly poor and growing poorer; there was nothing certain about her future. She was wearing made-over clothes for the first time in her life, and she laughed to see how unimportant such things really are. Oh, for the matter of that, she'd make them over and over again; and an idea of how to get something

A GINGHAM ROSE

effective out of an old green silk ran dizzily through her head.

Above all things she was amused at John's long face. Why take one's self so seriously? It was so conceited to go bothering about a mite like one's self! She all at once saw new promise in her work, felt a joyous rush of faith in herself; life was surely full to reeling with golden possibilities. And all above and about was the beautiful, sun-soaked, wise old world; the dear old great-great-great-grandfather world! Everybody's worthy ancestor! People in passing turned for another glimpse of the vivid face and went on their way building absent-minded air-castles about her, about the two of them; for, of course, the young man was in love with her. Who would not be? Idle guessing follows its idle plan in building the kind of truth it cares to see.

As they rode up-town Anne turned her face back to the manufactured breeze of the swiftly moving car. John watched her curiously. "Do you know, kid," he said, "you are rarely pretty to-day?"

"And do you know, John," she admitted con-

A GINGHAM ROSE

fidentially, "I am *feeling* rarely pretty to-day. Do you ever have days, John," she laughed low, "when your belt-pin won't stay, and your back hair won't do? Well, this is not one of those days!"

"Maybe not, for you," smiled John.

The girl's mood was too strong, too exuberant, to take note of anything outside its own current. "Was the air ever so mellow?" she asked, shutting her eyes and holding on to her wide hat.

After a long ride they climbed off the car and turned into the park. At once the rattle and noise and glare of the street seemed as far away as the sudden coming into the sunshine had made the unexpected scene in the studio seem. The red eye of the going sun glinted and glanced through the thick trees, the faint breeze that foretells night was stirring and creeping stealthily among the rushes and papyrus and playing fantastically in the deep border of elephant-ears along the margin of the lake.

"Truly, a golden day, Nancy," and John rested his hand lightly on her arm. "But, bless you, no one ever needs to tell you things like that. You can see for yourself."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I do believe I can," she admitted boastfully.

"You seem so absurdly little in this big place," and in spite of himself he laughed down into her eyes. Everything whispered to him that he was on dangerous ground; but Anne was so pretty to-day, so human, and just this once— The girl flushed and walked faster.

"That is a stunning dress you have on to-day," he persisted doggedly. "Manet would either have lost his head or painted his masterpiece if he'd seen you as you are now. He might have done both!"

"Then it seems not so bad to look 'absurdly little,' " she admitted.

"Now, if you would just cultivate a habit of acting as little as you look you'd be a fairly nice sort of girl," John sighed. He glanced away across the lake to the wide stretches of green beyond, and wondered what was possessing him to talk so to the girl. Things were certainly bad enough as they were. But she was beautiful to-day, and so was everything. He would not let it happen again. Always picture-making of everything about him, he wondered what the effect would be if she were to go down by the lake

A GINGHAM ROSE

among the tall elephant-ears. It might change the drift of things. "Run along down by the water, little girl," he laughed, "and coax the secrets out of the elephant-ears."

She hesitated a moment, then the fantastic notion caught her up and she ran and bent her head above a great wide leaf. "Oh," she laughed with a glance at John, "I'll be never so persuasive!"

"The poor elephant-ear!" sighed John with half-earnest sympathy.

Then Anne listened close, with a hand raised to warn John to silence.

"The leaf says," she began in a tone of conspiracy, "that Anne and John are a pair of blind babies, or that, perhaps, they are not really blind, but like all the other grown-up babies, they are just pretending. It says that it is a very wonderful world when one comes to be as wise as an elephant-ear. And it says that John, especially John, is afraid to know things as they really are, and that Anne, being a very little girl in a very big world, does very well to be afraid. It says, Johnny, that little girls and elephant-ears have to be so careful about really-truly

A GINGHAM ROSE

things because their feet are fast and their heads get so easily blown off in the wind."

John stood silenced, amazed and wondering anew at the wayward instinct of the girl.

"Why, Johnny," she laughed, "this must be a lady elephant-ear, because I heard a distinct giggle, and she says 'P. S.' She wishes to add that she does not set herself up to be wise about everything, nor would she for worlds presume to advise, but, considering all things, she for one would rather get up on her toes now and then, even at the risk of getting her head into the wind, than live all her days like a plebeian garden-cabbage. She says, too, that John, being a very big young man, with very big hands and feet, ho-ho! may take bigger risks in the wind than most young men and with not so much danger to himself after all. And she admits that on second thought Anne might just as well put up her head and be looking about, for she never was a girl to believe anything simply because she had been told. Why, John Warren, the saucy thing yawned right in my face!"

"You see, you should have let me do the talking," boasted John.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne was still a moment, listening, then she fairly chuckled with delight and held the big leaf close to her face like a cup. "She says, Johnny, that she has heard a great many men talk in that way before, and that it always amuses her so, because, tied here in the hollow, day in and day out, she has learned not to be disturbed by the boasting of young men, for—just listen to this, John—through this very boastfulness, if we but manage adroitly, we can make the bragging ones tell us the secrets the world tells them and keep our loosely-put-on heads comfortable, too. Wait! She adds that we must be looking to our hearts, however, because masculine boastfulness so often sounds for all the world, to little girls in big parks, like strength. She says that one learns to be quite a philosopher, living between the park benches and the fishes and that—what?" and Anne bent her head very low to listen; "she says, Johnny, that she guesses that Anne, being a human, must be very hungry by this time."

"Nancy, Nancy, how many-sided is your talent!" John sighed, while a thought, quick as a streak of scarlet vine over gray rock, crossed

A GINGHAM ROSE

his made-up mind. Was the girl not worth the sacrifice of certain things, after all? Her tact, her color, her insight, her impulsive heart, her generosity, her ability—all the little leaves and tendrils of the bright-red vine were clear to him for one moment. But clever people, like John, people a little short of genius, perhaps not so much by limitation as by an unwillingness to submit to a complete singleness of purpose, walk much of their lives along the very brink of big truth. Cleverness is selfishness and self-consciousness, and either of these dims the face of truth. So he let the good moment go by.

They hurried laughing and talking lightly up to the inn and took possession of a little table by the veranda rail. "We might be on a boat," she said with a sigh of contentment, as her eyes swept the great spaces of shadowy green. "Wasn't it Stephen Crane who called that look of things," and she waved her hand toward the sward, " 'a sea of grass' ?"

The waiter obtruded the card between them with commercial obsequiousness, and they smiled at the incongruity.

"Too hot for much, John," she suggested.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Just cold things, don't you think, except coffee? I want to live, not to eat."

"How about cold lobster?" smiled John.

"That," she admitted, "is a compromise."

"And some ale?"

"I hope so."

When the lobster came she looked very seriously at John. "Now," she said, "if you cheat me of my half, by as much as a claw, I shall stop by and tell the lady elephant-ear. She will scold you properly, too, because ladies with hyphenated names are always mighty particular about such details."

"And I have been thinking it over," laughed John, "and I am of the opinion that she is not a fit person for you to know. She talks too much for her size."

"Humph!" and she put her small chin into the air. "And you? Shall you cut her, too?"

"That's different," said John. "There, little girl, is your lobster, and remember, lobster is no predigested package of health-food."

So for an hour they juggled fun back and forth, forgetting everything but the joy of being alive, hungry, and with what they liked to

A GINGHAM ROSE

eat before them. Then came the coffee and John's cigarette, and as the waiter held the match between them they laughed at each other in the weird flash of light. A curious, telling bit of painting it is that the little matches with their brushes of orange flame do here and there in the dark night on pairs of undecided faces.

"Finished?" asked John, after a while. "Let's get out in the night. It's deliciously cool out there."

They crossed the brilliantly-lighted veranda with its incongruous human burden and moved slowly down the steps, then came to a stop in the middle of the driveway, wondering which path to choose for a walk. Destiny swooped and, catching up the pause as her cue, found a way for them. Out of the night came a rushing trap driven by a girl in white. John threw his arm about Anne and ran with her, and none too soon. The girl driving and the man by her side looked back and laughed; so much Anne saw in one swift, backward glance. The ground sloped away suddenly before them and they could not, would not, stop until the level brought them up beneath a great spreading

A GINGHAM ROSE

black tree. In the thick dark the boy's arms closed about her and, blindly self-amazed, he kissed her.

"Anne, Anne, kiss me," he whispered.

"No, no, no," she sighed and her eyes sought his aghast.

"But you will, Anne, you know you will. Why not now?"

Her girlish hands closed with gentle force about his face as in the twilight they had closed about the great leaf.

"John, dear," and her voice was very low, "you know you may not kiss me. You are forgetting—Catherine." She scarcely breathed the girl's name and her eyes filled with the rush of pity that came over her for Catherine and herself.

John's arms fell to his sides and he bowed his head to the girl's shoulder. She stood stroking his face absently. He seemed all at once so much younger than she, and the woman born in her of the strange moment realized vividly how his mother must care for him.

"What must we do, Anne, dear? I can't think."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"We must go home," said the girl.

"Yes, I suppose we must," he answered automatically.

They moved slowly away from the shadow of the tree to the path by the lake. The clang of the cars as they approached the entrance jangled on the girl's senses. She paused and laid her hand on John's sleeve.

"The lady elephant-ear is sighing, John. Do you hear?"

"Oh, Anne, don't."

"She says, John, that strange things happen in this world all in a flash, sometimes, a flash that lets even little girls see ever so far, perhaps farther than men ever do. And, John, she says no doubt it would be all for the best if little girls would remember, but that memory never has been the biggest part of little girls. They have to learn their lessons over and over again." Her voice broke.

"Can you ever forgive me?" whispered John.

"She says that men are always sorry like that," and a smile as wan as heat-lightning played over the girl's face in the night. "Besides, there is nothing to forgive. I think we

A GINGHAM ROSE

must really have known all along that it would happen. But, perhaps, after all, it was just the work of that big, terrible, black tree; and you and I had very little to do with it."

Then they walked along in silence to the gate. The big brooding park and the girl's sick heart sent line after line of the *Drama of Exile* reeling through her head:

"Dost thou know
Aught of their futures?
Only as much as this:
That evil will increase and multiply
Without a benediction."

From the depths of her soul she begged again
and again the next line,—

"Nothing more?"

And always the answer mocked her—

"Why so the angels taunt.
What should be more?"

All the way down-town she sat with wide eyes looking into the city night, for when she closed them she could remember what she told herself she must forget. She was so tired, and more

A GINGHAM ROSE

discouraged than in all her life before. She rebelled against herself, against John, against the force of things she had failed to meet. She told herself bitterly that she had not really tried. She smiled with a new cynicism as she remembered how only a little while before she had been so thankful just for being alive, how she had dared believe in herself. She wanted now, above all things, to be away from John, to be alone. She nearly hated him. She wanted to live over again the whole day, to see, if she could, what there was left.

When they got to her door she took the latch-key out of John's hand; she dreaded his doing the least thing for her. She wanted to get to her own room.

She ran up the dark stairs and through the halls safely, as a drunken man senses his way. She unlocked her door, and, closing it quickly behind her, locked it again from the other side. She leaned back against the white panels with a great sigh.

The maid had been in and lighted the gas and left it turned low, so that she need not come into a dark room, and she could see herself dimly in

A GINGHAM ROSE

the long mirror that hung on her closet door. The little room was stifling, and she pulled off her collar and unfastened the throat of her dress, and always she kept her eyes on the eyes in the glass. She put out her hand, watching the reflected jet of light, and turned the gas on full. So she stood a long time, her dark head held straight against the white door, eyes searching eyes mercilessly, truth for once given no quarter. Slowly she moved forward, fascinated, irresistibly drawn, until, with a smothered cry, she put her hands over the eyes in the glass and, dropping her head on her arms, sank slowly to the floor in a miserable heap of humiliation.

"Oh," she moaned, "you have lost him now, lost him. You have made yourself cheap. I wish I had kissed him; I never may again. Oh, John, dear," she cried, "I am so alone; you must, you must understand!" The storm broke, for the little girl had got her head into the wind.

The pale dawn had begun its work with reality when drowsiness overtook her. In the half-light it seemed to her that all her "book-people" were standing about the room whispering to one another that she had been untrue to them.

A GINGHAM ROSE

She turned her tired head on the pillow and promised, "I will be true from now on ; I will, I will."

CHAPTER VII

“—yet more was to learn.”

For three long weeks Anne heard no word of John. After the first miserable, restless days her good sense and health rebelled, and hope lifted her head. Her work was the resource that came to the rescue. The rejected manuscript rested undisturbed in the green pasteboard box under her bed. She did her best to put all thought of John away with the story. For John, though he did not know it, had suggested the theme of the story, to her indignation, and now, more than ever before, it seemed impossible to take it up. Besides, she was learning things. She went at some short, simple themes with energy and persistence and was able after a while to see through them a certain gain of patience. But “patience” is always expensive, and to smile through tears is no such fun, after all.

Anne was younger than she dreamed, and the patience was just numbness disguised for the

A GINGHAM ROSE

occasion. The world in its new and enormous aspect was teaching her that handling and experience have something in common, and she was low with humility.

She contented herself with dreaming over the big things and the rejected book, and worked as she had never worked before. It was no less than a revelation to her how well she got on without John. She deliberately made her life severe, getting comfort out of making long hours a kind of penance for unanalyzed wrong-doings.

Her room was at the top of the house, and while the regular boarders were out of town and the house filled with transients or busy people who were out all day, with the south window open and the door wide, the place became not only livable but attractive. It is an interesting thing, the courtesy with which the plainest room assumes the personality of its guest.

She spent the late afternoons and the twilights walking in the park. She avoided the lake without owning it to herself. It was amusing being lost, buried alive, in the great throng of gay, friendly summer people. She reveled in the mood of the onlooker, learned something

A GINGHAM ROSE

worth while every now and then, too. From the habit of watching others she got into a way of watching herself, then the whole scope of existence became a big iridescent bubble, a symbol wrapped in the story-maker's haze.

Living in shadows and fancies, she ended by taking herself for a shadow, a fancy. So far as John was concerned it was as if she had sounded him once for all, had met him in a clear light, face to face, and had found him—a shadow. She felt sure she could pass him in the throng without a quiver. She told herself that she had known all along that one day there would come a test and that she would lose in the balance against Catherine and all that Catherine stood for. She smiled with self-contempt to see how she had gone on answering the "small voice" with the inconsistent faith that John *could* not be unfaithful to Catherine, no matter what he was to her.

The acknowledged insincerity turned the days into months and the nights into years, and she grew older than John would ever be. What had been a kind of humanized adoration for the boy had burned itself out in a flare, and in the long

A GINGHAM ROSE

moment of light her eyes held after the flare she comprehended a kind of patience all-feminine and a mother-like sympathy for what she saw the man was inevitably growing to be. So, watching shadows, mistaking clouds for bubbles, seeing herself and the rest of her fellow creatures mere children of "fate," she bridged the gap. She played at the game of self-cheating and took half-truths for a tonic, and it was no less than wonderful how her cheeks bloomed on in the face of blighting conviction. The keenest sense of humor goes napping when its master needs to grow.

She came down to early breakfast one late summer morning giving out the kind of glow that can emanate from nothing in the world but a healthy self-respecting young girl. The jaded summer boarders looked, then looked again. The house was filled with "substitutes," people who make a week's living at a time and descend from Harlem to the Fifties, trying earnestly, by a jump from the frying-pan into the fire, to be-fool themselves with reflected glitter and reduced rates. Anne found them amusing, but a trifle disconcerting. They had a way of forcing real-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ity that was both tactless and uncomfortable, and out of harmony with the life of a dreamer and a bubble.

One glance at the letters by her plate set her heart thumping; there was the long expected and much dreaded letter from John. She wondered, a little bitterly, why it had to come at all after all this time. There was one from Victor, too; it was a very long time since she had heard from him. The third was from the publisher to whom she had sent her latest short story. At least it was not the story back again, but she could not believe it possible that she had had a story accepted at the first place it was offered. She wondered if perhaps she had come to a turn in her long lane.

Opposite Anne sat a young man with his throat upholstered in a tone-poem tie and his shallow eyes blinking at her with frank curiosity over his morning paper. The young woman by his side glanced up from the column she was reading over his shoulder and giggled at Anne.

"It's a mighty bad sign when a young lady keeps her letters to read by herself," she simpered.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne smiled patiently and turned her letters over, considering each one carefully.

"Well, I'll clear myself of suspicion by reading this one at least," and she tore open the envelope from the publisher. There was a fair-sized check inclosed for the story and a flattering request to see more, "shorter preferred." "Just my wages," she said to the young woman who worked "down-town." "The only real difference between your work and mine is that you always get paid and I seldom do."

"A regular job is the best way," commented the young man of the tie, with the remaining third of his attention glued to the account of a current murder trial. The young woman felt somehow abashed and wondered rather resentfully how Anne managed to look so "stylish" in cotton dresses and such faded-out colors.

When Anne at last got back to her room she sat down by the window and spread the letters out before her. She was happy about the story; it was nothing to have sent the others to five or six places before they reached their destinies, and she needed the money. But she was trembling to know what John had to say. The day had

A GINGHAM ROSE

seemed so serene in the beginning and now—she was afraid again.

“Well,” she sighed, “I won’t be able to give my mind to Victor until I know the worst John has to say. Dear old Vic is used to waiting and this time he won’t know.”

John’s letter was short, but it left the girl stunned.

Dear Nancy:

I am just in town again and hard at work after three blessed weeks in Vermont. I want to tell you before any one else is told that Catherine and I are to be married in October. Now be a good girl and write me how glad you are for me. By the way, Nancy, Catherine was as annoyed as I about her aunt, and she joins me in hoping that we are always to see a great deal of you. How are the stories coming on? If you will just get down to hard work you’ll make a go of it, I am certain. Come in to see me when you are in the neighborhood. I need your criticisms; can’t get along without them, in fact. Let me know how you are. As ever,

JOHN WARREN.

A GINGHAM ROSE

The girl sat very still, her puzzled, hurt eyes staring back at the brazen strip of sky that shone above the row of brownstone houses opposite.

"John," she gasped, "how very sensible!" All the scorn her lonely life had gathered rose over her face like a cloud. "When in doubt take the trick," she laughed harshly. "Oh what a fool I have been! How does a man dare to be like that and go on living face to face with himself!" She tossed the letter from her and eyed it with horror. But in a moment, her mouth set tight in pride, she picked it up and resolutely put it away in the box under the bed with the story. "I shall read it again and again so that I may never forget what a fool I am capable of being." By her trembling mouth and hands it seemed that after all a "child of fate" could suffer on her way. Poor little Anne!

"Dear Vic," she breathed, coming back to the window and opening his letter. "You are worth a dozen of him." It was not long before her sympathies had left her to wrap themselves about Victor, who was having troubles that made her own seem child's play.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Vine Acres, Illinois.

My Dear Nancy :

Good and bad luck have come to me so close on each other's heels since I last bothered you with my scrawling that I hardly know where to begin in the telling. We'll take the bad first and have it over with, though I am afraid some of it is not to be so easily shaken off. You know as well as any one what February and March are in Chicago. This year they were even more vicious than usual, and they very nearly made an end of me. I had a cough when I saw you last; I remember you scolded me for not taking care of myself. When the cough was pretty bad I got a chance at some interesting work, newspaper stuff, cartoons and "stories," and as it is the sort of thing I like best to do, I went in for it. That meant being out at all hours of the night, and as the weather never was known to give a fig for the feelings of a newspaper man,—we've got 'em, you know, opinion to the contrary,—I came in for more weather than I was worth. The doctors sat on my case, gloomy tribe they are! and pronounced me the victim of things of many syllables and pre-

A GINGHAM ROSE

scribed something known in the past ages as "rest." I wrote my father and he made me chuck the whole game and come down home for an indefinite stay. We have a jolly place here, and I was cared for like a sick thoroughbred, which I am not, and of course I got along fast enough. By June I was pretty well mended and had my traps packed to get back to town, when my father was thrown from his horse and killed. I suppose it was the shock, for I was mighty fond of him, Nancy, and I had an awful hemorrhage. And, dear girl, but they do take the life out of a man; his nerve, too. Now the doctors have added a syllable and say that mere rest won't do and that I must quit the climate. What is more, more honest, too, I decline to go in for a "short life and a merry one" myself. And it seems that a lot of people have been what they called "saved" by going in time, and as they all say I have a good chance it seems the only thing to do. It is a free country, you know, and I can come back if I don't like it. The good luck, if there can be any in such a state of affairs, is that the estate is in beautiful shape and that I can do just what I like for the

A GINGHAM ROSE

rest of my natural life, be it long or short. I want to be certain, though, that Arizona is just the place, so I am coming to New York first to see Doctor Alexander Marr, who was a class-mate of my father's at Harvard and who is away up as an authority on these little beasties that have taken such a shine to my system. What is more, I decline to go into exile till I have had a glimpse of you and Johnny. According to count, I reach New York next Saturday afternoon, and don't be afraid to see me, for, except this hack I so tenderly cling to, you wouldn't know there was anything the matter. I want to talk over your work with you. You know I always banked on you, Nancy, to make our days at school stand for something more than just cleverness. And I have been wondering—a sick man is selfish, you know—if there is a room to be had in your house? It would be jolly and like old times. But speak up if you are busy and would rather I went somewhere else. Only, please don't, for the fact is I shouldn't think of Marr and of taking the long way around except for seeing you. What is the use of having more pennies than you know how to spend if you can't

A GINGHAM ROSE

see the best girl alive? Could you let me know by return post? I am a lot of trouble, but I can't help it this time.

As ever,

VIC.

More than one crinkled, wet spot on the paper told its story of sympathetic eyes. Anne was shocked and terrified. In the bruises of the time everything ahead looked black and her troubles flocked about her till the daylight seemed shut out. For a long time she had realized that Ruth was slipping out of her life. Ruth loved her from habit and in spite of the fact that she did not understand her. Anne wanted to be loved because she *was understood*.

Of John she did not dare let herself think, and now, Victor, big, awkward, gentle Victor, whom she snubbed, and slighted, and made fun of, was ill of a terrible disease, and maybe going to die. She realized how she had always counted on him, after all. It was too much, and she broke down in a storm of desolation. But this was Tuesday; he would arrive on Saturday; he must have an answer at once. She must not fail him now,—never again. Too much in

A GINGHAM ROSE

earnest to care if her eyes were red she took her letter down to the kitchen to find if he could have a room. That over, she hurried back to write her answer.

Victor Dear:

It was good enough to have a letter from you after all this long time, but the things you have to tell me about break my heart. You know how it was when my father died,—he was really all I had,—and I understood your sympathy then just as I want you to understand mine now. And you ill? That does not seem possible. Of course, I want you to come right here. I shall look after you every minute and make you take your umbrella and wear your overshoes though there is not a cloud in the sky. Telegraph the train so I may come to Jersey to meet you. I love the ferry-ride, you know. We'll talk over everything under the sun. I can hardly wait to see you. Don't sit by an open window in the cars.

As ever, NANCY.

When Victor read her letter, in spite of his

A GINGHAM ROSE

six feet and an inch or two to spare, his eyes filled.

“Bless the baby,” he smiled. “Never had a mother in all her life, and mothering me like that. By Jove, it’s not so bad, being told to keep out of the draft.” He telegraphed her:

Arrive Saturday, two. Umbrella up, overshoes on, window shut. V.

CHAPTER VIII

Our business in this world is not to succeed,
but to continue to fail, in good spirits.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

Victor reached New York without mishap, but the very next day there occurred one of those hypocritical, smooth-faced, early autumn skies, and a drenching rain was poured down on the two young philosophers' heads for nothing in the world, it seemed, but to show what a pretty sky can do when it likes, without a sign of rehearsing. A cold so serious resulted that Anne sent a messenger flying for Doctor Marr. He examined Victor, drew a long face, said one or two unquotable things under his breath, then insisted upon moving him at once to his sanatorium. His father's son must have good care and under his own roof.

Marr was in a great rage when he found that Victor had been caught out in a storm with a girl. He met Anne in the hall while they were

A GINGHAM ROSE

getting things ready to move Victor and gave her a good scolding for having had a hand in such carelessness. He said one or two pointed things about "women, anyway" and "common sense."

Anne stood quite still until he had finished, then she raised her eyes to his. She was getting rather tired of being always in the wrong.

"I am not a child, Doctor Marr, and what is more, I will not endure being spoken to in any such way. I would have given my eyes," again she raised them that the old man might fully estimate the sacrifice, "rather than have had such a thing happen, and I venture to say that with all the fuss you are making you don't care a tenth as much as I do right now!"

The gray-topped man of science drew back and a long, low whistle of amazement made the silent hall eloquent. Anne looked up surprised, then something terrible seemed to be happening to her. To the shock of science, she put her face down in her hands and, leaning against the stair-rail, laughed till her eyes were wet.

"Well, I'm damned," he said profoundly. "Do you women all have—fits?" There was mas-

A GINGHAM ROSE

culine superiority unveiled in his very eyeglasses.

"I guess we do," she admitted with her hand on her side. "But you have no idea how irresistibly funny you looked whistling like that. I suppose," and she made a frantic effort at composure, "it was imprudent of me to go anywhere with Victor, even under a clear sky, and now I am being impudent besides. Oh, dear me," she sighed. "I am so sorry, please?" She held out her hand with a baffling veer to shyness.

The man struggled a moment, then gave in completely and grasped the small palm in his. "I—got caught out in that storm myself," he admitted sheepishly, and they both laughed. So began a friendship of squalls and tempests and bright sunshine; stormy it was bound to be, but held well together by that surest of all ties, a sense of the ridiculous.

"Victor says I am to come to the sanatorium as much as I like?" she asked.

"Certainly, every day, all you like," and with a grim smile he went back to Victor.

The invalid was settled in a large south room with a comfortable couch drawn into the big

A GINGHAM ROSE

bay-window. "Now, young man," said Marr, gently, when he was comfortable, "you and I must do all we can to help the sunshine."

"Nothing but stubbornness could keep a fellow sick with you and Nancy and the sunshine for medicine," said Victor, gratefully. "Isn't she a fine girl, though?" he said with the enthusiasm that does not even consider contradiction.

"Well," said Marr, putting his hands in his pockets, "she has a way of making an old man think so."

But the cold grew worse and worse, and Victor and Anne were drawn to each other as they had never been before. Each was alone in the world, and the world is a good-sized place. In the anxiety and the new sense of dependence between them the girl's natural affection developed into something entirely womanly and anxious to serve, while Victor's school-boy love for the girl and her whimsicalities marched into adoration before the unexpected force of her tact and gentleness. She became to him a thing apart and unattainable.

On the worst day of all, when life itself seemed

A GINGHAM ROSE

hanging in the scales, Marr sent for Anne to come to his office. She came quickly, and her white face and fright nearly convinced the man that his surmises were right about what existed in the way of an attachment between her and Victor. He patted her hand a moment in his awkward way and the kindness broke through her control.

"There, now," and he turned back and walked to the window. "Perhaps it won't be so bad, after all." He was being a coward for almost the first time in his life. "But, Miss Anne, if the young man has any relations, and I know that he has, up in Vermont—I knew his father, you know—they should be notified of his condition at once. It is serious, little girl, mighty serious. Do you know his people? His—aunt, Mrs. Tyler?" he asked with a shrewd glance at Anne.

"Yes," she answered brokenly, the tears rolling down her face, "I know them. Oh, it is wicked that people who are young, and want to live, and might be useful as Victor might be, have to"—she could not finish, and all at once, without another word, she sat down at the doc-

A GINGHAM ROSE

tor's desk and wrote to Catherine Gage. Then she went straight back to Victor and did not leave him until the crisis was past.

Mrs. Tyler and Catherine came to town at once and drove out to the sanatorium with John; Catherine had wired him to meet them. They waited in the reception-room while Mrs. Tyler was invited into Marr's office for an interview.

Agatha Tyler and Alexander Marr had known each other ever since the man's college days, when he had spent more than one vacation at the home of Victor's father in Vermont. Something had gone wrong, no one but the man and the woman concerned ever knew what, but certainly there had been a "story" of one sort or another—a story that had "come out wrong," with a resultant antagonism that time had failed to crumble. The first perfunctory hand-clasp and glance declared that the peace of silence was broken. It had been twenty years since they had met, and the change in each face gave its shock. But the spirit was as strong as ever.

"You have been very kind to my nephew," she said stiffly.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Possibly," Marr admitted, "to the son of his father."

"I found your note at my hotel," she said, flushing. "I am happy that the crisis is over. He continues to improve?"

"Yes, oh yes," said Marr, "I think there is no immediate danger." He readjusted his glasses and watched the woman keenly. It crossed his mind that a man grows old more easily than a woman: there was a comfortable, if acrid, victory in the idea. "But it will perhaps be as well if you stay in town for a few days. One may be well enough amused and your niece will enjoy the change from the country. Miss Preston and the nurse are all it is necessary to have in attendance."

"Miss Preston?" and Agatha Tyler raised her lorgnette and her brows. "What in the world has that impossible girl to do with Victor?"

"Surely you remember that it was she who wrote you of his illness?" The doctor was puzzled.

Mrs. Tyler had supposed the letter was from John and in the excitement of getting off had

A GINGHAM ROSE

asked no questions. So Catherine was capable of duplicity! After a moment of ill-concealed rage she decided that on the whole she respected the girl for it. "It had slipped my mind," she added with stubborn, if rickety, dignity.

"Something rankles here," said the doctor to himself. "Agatha has been trying her tricks on these youngsters, hey?" He looked forward to a talk with Anne. Doubtless they would discover they had something more than temperament in common. "Really," he said, with irritating benevolence, "I think we have Miss Preston to thank that he has pulled through. She keeps him alive by making him want to live." He rubbed salt into the wound with professional adroitness.

"Now that I am here, there will, of course, be no further occasion to impose upon her time," said the woman, firmly.

"On the contrary," and his voice rose in pitch, "I am forced to be frank with you. Except Miss Preston, people irritate him extremely, dangerously, in fact. I must absolutely forbid any interference with things as they are. I beg, Madam, that you will show your customary—

A GINGHAM ROSE

tact." His mouth twitched slyly. "You may depend on me to inform you if your presence becomes necessary."

"Evidently I have presumed in my natural wish to be of service to my nephew," and Agatha Tyler rose, a very mountain of wrath and dotted velvet.

"By no means," said the man, blandly, but rising with alacrity. "The case is simple. He is contented and too ill to risk a change."

She trembled in the effort to compose herself, and the jet butterfly on her bonnet seemed about to take flight. The man of science found himself wondering what the bonnet and the woman would look like without the butterfly. She moved to the door with an expanding sweep of skirts. "I shall, of course, not return here unless it becomes absolutely necessary."

"That is, certainly, for you to decide," and he bowed low as he held the door wide for her to pass.

"Come, children," she said thickly to John and Catherine, who were "discovered" standing farther apart than necessary in the reception-

A GINGHAM ROSE

room. As they passed out of the house, John caught a glimpse of himself in a false position and with no way out except by meeting violence with violence. In that he did not believe. John's chosen mode of procedure was indirection; he detested a scene.

Alexander Marr went back to his office and shut himself in. He raised his long arms and shook them as if his cuffs annoyed him, and paced about the room rapidly. Then he dropped into his armchair by the window. Time was for the moment annihilated. He rested his head on his hand and closed his eyes, tapping his knee with his glasses. He saw Agatha Tyler when she was still Agatha Stetson; he saw a country home and Vermont's blue and violet hills. Agatha was a pretty girl, but fiery and self-willed and blind. The sunshine played impishly over his head and hands, throwing light on all the finely etched lines of time and living—or having lived.

"Come in," he said gently, in answer to a tap he knew on the door.

"They have gone?" and Anne entered cau-

A GINGHAM ROSE

tiously. "I listened at the door," she admitted, "and I knew it could not be as still as that if *she* were here."

"Yes, they have gone." He smiled and put his glasses on again. He felt old and did not rise. "Come here to me, Anne."

The girl came to his side and looked down on him curiously.

"Why does Agatha Tyler dislike you, child?"

Anne flushed and stood very straight. "Because she is a hard, ugly, old woman," she said firmly.

"Mercy on us," and the old man smiled grimly. "Can't you rig the truth up a little more becomingly?"

"Not this time," and Anne smiled back with a youthful echo of the grimness.

"Well, well, we seem to have another tie in common," he said, getting to his feet. "Is Victor still sleeping?"

"I'll go and see." She laughed shyly and left the room.

CHAPTER IX

The lute's fixt fret, that runs athwart
The strain and purpose of the string,
For governance and nice consort
Doth bar his wilful wavering.

—SIDNEY LANIER.

Marr found his morning paper dull reading and threw it aside to ponder the more immediate problem of Anne and Victor. Mere politics became indigestible food for reflection to an old gentleman with two youngsters on his romantic mind. The situation was developing under his eyes; he saw, but he knew no name to call it by. To "pronounce" on a case had early become with him a habit, then a necessity, and finally a kind of mental dissipation. All the romance he had was a matter of deduction. But Anne was of "to-day," and a very different product from the girls of his day, "of yesterday"; he ran his hands quickly over his gray hair.

"Well," he summed the question up at last,

A GINGHAM ROSE

"if he isn't in love with her he isn't worth the trouble of saving, and if she is in love with him, then there is the devil to pay!" Anne's faithfulness in rain or shine was a miracle to be explained on only one theory. He was able to guess what a woman in love would do from having learned rather violently what a woman not in love will not do. Though he reasoned by inversion, his conclusion must be right.

The girl's wonderfully intelligent hands and her sensible attention to his cautions against contagion indicated to his wonder and respect that here was a woman who seemed to have a mind all her own. And since she had dared laugh at him—"well, turn it as you will, she is a very remarkable girl, remarkable!" She always stopped in on her way up to Victor's room for a "good morning" and news. He sat drumming his fingers on the chair-arms and turning the problem over till she arrived.

"Doctor?" she pulled off her glove with boyish energy and held out her hand.

He took the hand and held it absently. He was tempted to ask her frankly all about things. The time was coming when it mattered very

A GINGHAM ROSE

much. He drew her over by the window and looked at her curiously. She stepped back, frightened. "Victor—is not—worse?"

"No, no," he said impatiently. "I'm a blundering idiot. I was thinking of something else. He is better every day,—and I was only wondering." The end was lame, and halt, and blind.

"Wondering?" she echoed with a faint smile. "That isn't like you, is it?" She was tired and the man had frightened her. She sat down in his chair by the window.

Marr glanced at her sheepishly, but something he caught about the look of her made him forget himself. He raised his head abruptly. "You look as if you had not slept well."

"Well enough—but not very long," she admitted.

"What do you mean by that? I'll tell you when there is any occasion to worry."

His temper made her laugh. "I wasn't worried particularly," she answered, "but I have to do my work at one time or another, and I was here all day yesterday, you know."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Your *what?*" he gasped, sensing something new and hostile.

"Surely you know—" she hesitated. Then she sat up very straight and defiant. The man looked as if it were so easy to be successful and rich that the strain on her tattered self-respect hurt her and made her harsh. "I write stories for my living," she said at last. It sounded so ridiculously inadequate! She blushed hotly.

"You *what?*" and the man's face was comically eloquent of horror. "You—" Then he laughed. "I think I see you, one of those flat-backed, flat-footed, loud-voiced caricatures in the Sunday papers!"

"No," she smiled patiently, "I'm not that; I am the thing as it really is."

The old face grew crimson. "Why, you little bit of a baby, you! Now, I want you to go straight home and pack up your duds and come back here at once, and we'll put an end to all this idiocy. I never heard of anything so preposterous in all my life!"

The girl's face shone: it was so beautiful, having a big, strong old gentleman care enough

A GINGHAM ROSE

to get into such a rage. It made her eyes smart, too.

"It is a fact, all the same," she insisted gently. "No one would be poor if every one were rich?" she laughed. "And that would be mighty stupid, wouldn't it?"

"It's rank injustice," and the man paced back and forth. His life for years had been filled with his work and his books, and, except in science, he had let the world pass by as it listed. The class Anne stood for was new to him. He took a chair and felt as limp as he looked. "Now, tell me all about it," he said, determined to get at the root of the thing.

She was very tired and preferred anything rather than talking about herself; she was more tired of herself than anything else; but the old man and his temper amused her.

"It isn't really unjust," she began. Her face was half thoughtful, half stubborn. "I don't believe many people would do their work unless they had to. The people who are crying for 'equality' are generally just the victims of their own inability. Deliver us from the monotony of

A GINGHAM ROSE

equality! I revel in inequality myself. And goodness knows I am low enough in the sky-line. But, you see, I find my purse going in defiantly for the levels, and that forces me to do my small best to continue a slight, but I hope picturesque, unevenness."

The old man winced. Her caustic sarcasm and the "old-young" look that rose over her face made him realize his impotency to bend the girl his way. She forced his respect. Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed. "You're a fighter, eh?"

"I suppose," she smiled. "I always believed you have to earn whatever you get that is better than mere existence. The 'silver spoon' is nothing unless it is an interesting spoon. And, you know, I am rather a fraud, after all. I've enough money in the bank to enable me, if occasion demanded, to die decently. But I am so absurdly provident. I am always thinking of a 'rainy day.' I can not happily eat up my last cent. I'd rather go hungry and have it to-morrow, for," she laughed again, "if I am hungry to-day I am certain to be so much more hungry to-morrow!"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Where have you picked up all your wisdom?" he asked, with no trace of a smile.

"I didn't pick it up," she answered. "It has been beaten into me. It is what my pride has to believe if it is to live."

"Do you like to write, Anne?" he asked gingerly, as if in the presence of a newly discovered disease and determined to know all before committing himself.

"Ah," and she looked up with her eyes shining, "that is another matter! I wouldn't give it up for worlds. Writing and making money out of what you *have written* are two different stories. I have great hope of doing something really good one of these days," she smiled with a little contradictory sigh, "because my stories are so hopelessly unpopular!"

"By Jove," and the old scholar's eyes kindled, "you've the right idea!"

"I suppose," and she followed up her advantage on the stubborn clay she had in her hands, "that you feel the same kind of contempt for popular stuff in your work, too?"

"Won't put up with it for a minute," he answered warmly.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"That's all there is to tell," she said finally. "Nothing's done, everything in the world to do, and I with nothing in the world but to do it!"

"I have no doubt you will do it," said the man, utterly subdued. "I beg your pardon for—"

"Now, please don't," she interrupted him. "I liked having you get into a temper about me. It's good having some one care so much."

Marr diligently frowned down his feelings. Very few self-supporting young women had come under his observation, and he owned to himself that he did not understand. He had thought them all cut and dried and full of "opinions."

"I have always been a blundering ass with women," he confessed with salty humility, "but I want to talk with you about the boy upstairs. That is what I started out to do this morning. He is better, Anne; no doubt about it; but he must get out of this climate before the cold comes on. How is it to be done?"

Anne gave him a hurried, startled look, then her eyes traveled back to the window.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"You see," Marr continued, letting his eyes follow hers, "the rains have begun."

She nodded. The rain was slanting across the window-glass and turning the pavement into a kind of misty mirror. "You mean," she hesitated, "who is to go with him?"

"That is exactly what I mean," he said.

Perplexed and tired as she was, a gleam of fun shot across her face. "Won't his Aunt Agatha feel it her duty to go with him?"

"That woman?" groaned Marr. "Anne, Agatha Tyler and I have had a grudge against each other for nearly thirty years, and I do not mean to let her end by killing off my pet patient. She'd drive even me crazy," he finished testily.

"If you didn't drive her crazy first," she laughed. "I don't know of any one else, except Catherine and John," she added. She spoke absently, words just a pretext to gain time for thinking, though the same question had been living in her mind for days.

"Well, I don't know John," said the man, sharply, "but I know too many people already, so let us not interfere with the existing order of

A GINGHAM ROSE

things. Victor is a fine fellow," he added, watching her shrewdly for a sign, a blush, perhaps.

"He is, indeed," she agreed serenely.

He felt hopeless to understand.

"Well," he said, "Arizona it must be. It's a wonderful climate—perpetual sunshine and blue skies. But, girl, the place is dead-alive, and I am afraid of the mental effect. I don't dare send him out there alone. The trouble is that when he is very bad he is afraid of every one but me. And I simply can not get away."

"He is not afraid of me," she said quietly.

"No, he is not," and the old eyes glared down on her most kindly. "I'd shut up the house and go out with him gladly, but for this crew of sick folk I have on my hands. There is no end of them just now, and I've got to submit to the majority. I'll die in harness, no doubt, simply because some deranged crank imagines that I know my business."

"Sick people always *do* imagine things," said Anne, sympathetically.

"By George," he laughed, pausing before her, "if you weren't as pretty as a flower and just an infant, I'd forge you a nurse's certificate

A GINGHAM ROSE

and send you out with him. You have too much humor ever to make a fool of yourself."

Anne flushed. "You have no idea what a talent I have for foolishness," she said, as she got to her feet and stood smoothing her gloves. Fear and courage were fighting a problem out in her heart and duty was looking on, grim enough. Two bright spots burned in her cheeks and made her eyes look feverish. Her mouth trembled a little now and then and her whole manner told of suppressed excitement. "Doctor," she said at last, her voice seeming to her to come from a long way off, "may I send the nurse away for a while? I have something important to talk over with Victor. I promise to be very careful about exciting him."

"But," said Marr, anxiously, "there must be no question about it. It would not take much to send him past our help just now."

"I know that," she said, moving toward the door like a sleep-walker.

Marr was quicker and planted himself squarely across her path. "What do you mean to do?" he demanded.

She stopped and gazed at him half-bewil-

A GINGHAM ROSE

dered. Then she laughed. Here was another obstacle. There was always some obstacle between her and her duty. Well, he had called her a fighter: she would prove it. She astonished him with a sweeping bow of mock acquiescence. Then, with an exquisite smile, she tossed her head.

"That, sir, is none of your business." She tried to slip under his arm, but he caught her and held her before him.

"You are scarcely dressed up to your manners," he retorted, with an amused glance at her rain-skirt and felt hat. "And be assured right here that I shall not stir one inch till you have told me what you mean to say to my patient. Now, begin!"

Anne gave a dramatic sigh, then deliberately took off her hat and coat. She drew up two chairs and faced them, then with great ceremony offered one to the doctor and took the other herself. "I do hope I am not taking your time," she said, settling herself comfortably.

"Oh, not at all," he responded grandly. "I can think of no pleasanter fate than an arm-

A GINGHAM ROSE

chair with something good to look at. May I smoke?"

"If you must," she condescended. Then there settled on the little office and the two stubborn, whimsical souls a silence as resigned as the peace of ages, while the clock on the mantel ticked for pulse.

All at once the man rose and pointed to the door. "There! get along with you as fast as you can go!"

Anne dodged under his arm and ran out without stopping to close the door. He followed her into the hall. At the landing she turned and looked back at him. The light from a high window fell all about her. She looked so young, so small—something like pity tightened his heart for her; he felt responsible. She waved her hand lightly, then turned and walked slowly up the stairs.

He went back to his office and shut the door again.

"She is the most likable girl I ever met," he sighed, "but she has something uncommon in that head of hers to-day, and I don't at all like the look of it." He glanced at the clock

A GINGHAM ROSE

and took up his neglected paper. "Now, I shall give her just twenty minutes and then I shall go straight up there, and, what is more, I shall do just as I like about knocking. I intend knowing what is going on in my own house!" And he read his paper—backward, for all that he thought about it.

CHAPTER X

Well, now; there's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth; yet this, the something else,
What's this then, which proves good yet seems un-
true?

—BROWNING.

Anne was alone in the big quiet hall, face to face with that terrible ghost, herself. All the lightness died out of her and she dragged on slowly. The doubts and the hopes and the dreams she had won for a birthright, she could not guess how, brooded about her openly. She paused at the door of Victor's room and faced decision. It was the last chance. She saw her future, two possibilities, wandering vaguely away before her, each full of chance, of peril, and of interest. Down one path she saw John, and he whispered to her again, "You will, Anne, you know you will. Why not now?" Her eyes owned a longing, but she turned away resolutely and rested her face against the cool panel of the

A GINGHAM ROSE

door. Then she chose, and knocked ; three light taps were her password.

The nurse opened the door and Victor raised himself eagerly for a look at the girl.

"Good morning, Miss Anne. Mr. Stetson and I were growing impatient. We were afraid the rain was keeping you in."

Anne nodded and went straight to Victor. She took his hand and looked from it to his face quizzically. "Been getting plump over night?" she questioned. Then she patted the pillows and Victor's eyes gave thanks.

"Take off your bonnet, there's a good girl, so a fellow can have a look at you. The storm has given you a regular bloom—" but the last word broke in an ugly cough, dry and racking. Anne took the glass from Miss Evans' hand and stood over him until he had control of himself again. "Miss Evans," she said firmly, "Doctor Marr says I may talk with Mr. Stetson alone for a while this morning, perhaps an hour. I think I understand about the medicine. I have just left the doctor."

Miss Evans smiled her thanks and had quietly

A GINGHAM ROSE

disappeared before Anne realized that she had taken one more step on her chosen way. She went cold as she understood that she was alone with Victor, had asked to be; and something she had just given up cried out and echoed to the depths of her heart. She walked about the room half-blinded, trying to control herself, moving the chairs and rearranging the books on the table,—anything to gain time.

“Even an old stick of a chair looks its best if you just move it about a bit,” laughed Victor. “What’s up, Nancy?”

Anne pushed a chair up by his couch and turned it so that she must face the light. When she had a struggle to meet, with herself especially, she did best if everything was against her. She dared not make things easy for herself.

“What has old Marr been talking with you about? You look excited,” he persisted.

“About you, Vic. He says you are better, ever so much.”

“Oh, Nancy, are you sure?” and his eyes wistfully searched hers for the truth.

“Yes, sure,” she answered. “And if we can

A GINGHAM ROSE

get you out to the land of sunshine before the bad weather comes you stand a good chance of getting as strong and well as ever."

"Nancy," he began appealingly, "I have simply not got the courage to face the journey."

"No one dreamed of sending you off alone," she smiled. "That is what we were talking about. Would you be willing to go with your aunt, Mrs. Tyler?" She watched him closely.

"I'll not go with her, not one step," he said firmly.

"Is there any one else?" she asked.

He was silent a while. "Odd, isn't it, that Johnny never comes to see me?"

"I suppose he is busy. Doing extra work, more than likely. They are to be married in October, you know, and that is not very far off now." She gazed into the crackling fire.

"Well, I don't need either of them, thank goodness," he said crossly. He seemed to forget everything else in watching the firelight on her face.

"Would you be contented to go out alone except with a competent nurse—Miss Thompson, perhaps?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Competent be hanged," said Victor. "No," and all the unreasonableness of illness was written on his face. "I won't, I won't go one step!" His voice broke weakly, but he hurried on. "I am a baby, I know, but some way I don't care any more. The truth is that you are the only person alive, except Marr, that I care two straws about, and I can't, I won't go away from where you are. I should rather live a little while here with you than a whole stupid, good-for-nothing life of vegetating out there without you. Anne, please, please, please don't let them take me away from you! I am afraid to die, and I should have died weeks ago but for you. You'd put courage into a poor devil with a rope around his neck. You won't let them take me out there, Nancy? You can do anything you try with Marr; you know you can." He put his big thin hand over hers and in spite of his struggles his eyes filled. A bad fit of coughing frightened her into the courage of brevity. She felt as if her pride was being killed by inches. "Anne, you'll talk to Marr?" he begged.

"Vic, dear, don't do that. They shall not take you away. They can not, because—" she

A GINGHAM ROSE

caught her breath at the plunge, "because I am going with you!"

"But, Nancy—" he began wonderingly, the blood rushing to his face.

"Now, you are not to talk until I have finished. I am as alone—more even—than you are; and there is no one who matters to me half as much as you do. And, Vic, if you have to go, I'll be glad to go along and take care of you." Her face glowed, but her eyes filled, and, slipping on her knees, she put her head down by Victor's arm.

Victor looked down on the smooth black braids and his dazed world went round; then he put his hand awkwardly on her head.

"But, how do you mean?" he asked gently. "Nancy, you know it would never do. I'd understand and of course I'd put cold lead through any one who didn't; but, dear, I'm not worth it. Before you are put in a false position I'll brace up and go by myself. And, Anne, I'm—not fit—to ask you—oh, little girl," and the big boy broke down completely. Paradise was in his hands and he could not honorably take it.

"Vic, Vic," she begged, "I simply can not

A GINGHAM ROSE

stand it to have you do that," and she stood over him as his own mother would have done.

"Forget what a weakling I am, girlie. The confounded disease takes all the sand out of a fellow."

"No, it does not," she said stoutly. "It just gives him another sort of sand. But, Vic," and her voice trembled again, "a girl always knows when a man—cares about her; even if he has never told her, she knows. She knows by instinct, I guess; and though I have treated you like a pickpocket ever since the day I met you, I really never meant anything by it. It seems to me I am always abusing the people I like best. Just the same," and she suddenly lifted her head with the proud look of the old Anne he loved best of all, "Victor Stetson, if you argued a *week* you couldn't convince me that you did not *like* me!" The return of her lighter self gave her courage and she hurried on: "I won't pretend to be dead in love with you, Vic, but I am not with any one, so that's no matter. And, Vic, if you like—we might—just for the sake of appearances, you know," and again the proud little head was close to his arm.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Blessed little ostrich," he smiled, daring now to stroke the braids. "Nancy, dear, no one ever had a more generous heart than you." In the moment Victor had grown to manhood and his face was aglow with the new birth into responsibility. "You have taken me by storm, dear girlie, and I can't think. Who could? Now, won't you go over there by the window, where I can't see you, for a while? There is so much to be thought of, do you know it?"

"Yes, I do know," said the girl, rising and looking bravely into his eyes; then she walked over to the window.

"Nancy," he called, in a very short time.

"Yes?"

"I believe I can think about as well if you are here." She came at once, and there was a generosity about her every movement that told of a longing to wipe out all the years of tyranny in one big sweep. Victor took her two hands in his, and his face was fine with earnestness. "Nancy, it is not so easy to talk about. I hate doing it, but this thing has got to be looked at from all sides. You must not be blind to what you are

A GINGHAM ROSE

doing. Dear girlie, do you know that this beastly disease of mine is contagious?"

"Of course, I understand," and her eyes were clear and frank. "I have thought of all that, too."

"Then, dear, till I am well it is just good friends?"

"Yes, Vic. I can work out there as well, maybe better, than here, and you can help me. We won't either of us be lonely then. That is what I meant, Victor." Anne's girlish dignity was beautifully pure in its sweeping over and beyond the difficulties she could only guess at.

"And, Nancy, if I do get well, and you have not come to care for me, or if there should be some one else,—we'll find a way out." He spoke low, and shyly rested an arm across her shoulder.

The door into the hall swung back and there stood Marr, by every sign self-convicted. His gray eyes shone suspiciously, and because of the flood-tide in his heart his voice came masked hoarsely.

"I have been standing by that door listening to words of wisdom out of the mouths of

A GINGHAM ROSE

babes and sucklings for—well, ever since it was decided that one of the babes could do anything she liked with Marr! And very glad I am that I have a nature above mere scruples.” He glared at Anne from beneath his deep brows. “You little minx, go down to my office and stay there till I come.”

Anne got to her feet and faced the contradictory old gentleman, and all the moods from anger to amusement chased one another across her young face. She ended by smiling adorably from one man to the other, then turned and walked to the door. “I’ll go,” she said over her shoulder, “but I am not sorry, and I do not take back a single word. What is more, it is not every girl gets accepted by the first man she proposes to!”

“Humph!” ejaculated the old man, as he shut her out of the room. “She is a rum little devil, I must say.” He turned and looked at Victor quizzically. “If I am not wrong in my hearing, she has a heart too big for her little shoulders. I declare, I am half in love with her myself!”

“Then,” said Victor, “the difference between you and me is just the other half.” He looked

A GINGHAM ROSE

back at the man of science with a new assurance, as if from man to man.

In the meantime Anne went slowly down the stairs. Out in the still hall the look of knowing more than experience could yet have taught her came back. She went into the office and sat very quiet with her eyes spread unseeingly upon the rain-blurred window. All at once they focused on a clear thought and she laughed. "It will absolutely annihilate Aunt Agatha Tyler! I think if I can just get that into the dear old man's head he won't make much of a fuss, after all!"

CHAPTER XI

Ah, this parting with the flower for which I would so gladly have given my life has left my sleeves wet with the dew.

—JAPANESE WOMAN'S DIARY.

The next morning was stormier than ever, and because of the weather, or because she did not think much about it one way or the other, Anne went over to the sanatorium in an old short skirt, a rather shabby jacket frayed in the facings, and a tam. The maid that let her in told her that the doctor wished to speak with her very particularly.

"What have I done now?" she asked, looking up at him.

He observed her with a critical air, then, nodding his old head wisely, he sighed. "Well, I held out hard against him, but I guess Stetson is right about it, after all. You *are* very good-looking."

"So sorry that honesty forbids me to reciprocate," she laughed, bowing low. "I seem to

A GINGHAM ROSE

have heard you say nearly the same thing before."

"Now," said Marr, "I've been thinking what a wonder you'd be in fine feathers!"

Something began rising in the girl's throat and she dropped her eyes to her coat-sleeve.

"I never succeeded in getting married myself," Marr laughed, "but even a bachelor hears a good deal about such things. I always read about weddings in the newspapers," he confessed. "Sort of fairy tales, you know, and I have a reprehensible curiosity about things that are none of my business. Now, I have an impression that women always get themselves a lot of—*fixings*!" he ended, comically helpless, with his hands in the air.

Anne collapsed into the nearest chair. "I am afraid that, after all, I can not afford to get married just now!" Her color was high and her mouth set tight.

Marr winced. "Now, none of that! I won't have it."

"The whole thing is so out of the ordinary that I had forgotten all about 'fixings.' We are going into the wilderness, aren't we? I shall be

A GINGHAM ROSE

a nurse, not a fine lady, for ever so long. Besides," the color rose again, "Victor doesn't care, doesn't even know, what I wear."

Marr put out his fine lower lip and marched up and down the room with his hands under his coat-tails. "Well, now, Anne, I am not so sure about that. What is more," and he straightened his shoulders defiantly, "I care! I guess I have a right to give a girl I like a wedding present, haven't I?"

"Now, please—" Anne began.

"That is just the idea," he laughed. "I please. You could not have put it better. Now, there are several days to spare, and I want you just to go round to the shops and get what you like; buy 'em out," he waved his hand grandly. "Then send the bills to me. That'll be my present."

"Present!" she echoed. "I should think so. It is a wonder you have a cent to your name. I'll do nothing of the sort. I *could* not!"

The man stared at her so helpless and so disappointed that she laughed in spite of herself. Then an idea arrived for Marr.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Of course you could not, bless you! I knew it all the time." He went to his desk, wrote a check, put it in an envelope, sealed it and addressed it elaborately to "Miss Preston, Kindness of Marr," blotted it with dramatic attention, then rose and set it against the clock. He strode up and down the room, talking such a string of irrelevant nonsense that she laughed whether she would or not, and at the first smile he brought up suddenly before the clock, and, after investigating the time of day, his eye by obvious accident lighted upon the envelope.

"Well, I never!" he laughed; "if I wasn't about to forget." He turned toward her with the envelope in his hands and all the twinkle held well back in his eyes. "A blundering old imbecile friend of mine, whom I have never succeeded in shaking off, left this around here and asked me to see that it reached you." He dropped into his chair and took up the paper again,—his usual refuge from annoyance and his resource in embarrassment. "Now run along to Victor," he said, turning to the editorials.

To the utter discomfiture of the "old imbe-

A GINGHAM ROSE

cile," he found two arms about his neck and a shower of tears demolishing the poise of his collar.

"Why, Anne, Anne child," he said, awkwardly patting her on the shoulders. "What is the trouble?" The girl could not find her voice. "Is all this too much for you, after all? Is the sacrifice bigger than you can stand? You know you can depend on me to help you, and Victor is no coward. Is it too much?"

"Oh, don't, don't talk so," she whispered. "I can't stand another word. I'm not used to having people so good to me, and it just about kills me!"

Marr's handkerchief came out with brave ostentation. "Well, you see, child," he said gently, "I haven't had any too much chance to be good to anybody, either, so let's just call it quits and begin all over. Humph!" he grumbled; "when Stetson sees your red eyes I'll just about get discharged!"

CHAPTER XII

Well, this cold clay clod
Was man's heart:
Crumble it, and what comes next?
Is it God?

—BROWNING.

"As it happened in your house, that makes it all your fault, and *that* makes it your duty to break the news to Victor's aunt and your old friend!" Anne sent her shaft of logic on a smile up to the old man from her low chair by the fire.

Marr was a lonely man and it had taken just these two "youngsters"—so he called them, a kind of tender disrespect—to make him acutely aware of it.

"So," he laughed, with fine irony, "I am to take my valuable life in my hands and tell her all about it!" He paced about the big room, the flying tails of his long black coat making him seem almost grotesquely tall.

Anne was in a "mood" on this particular

A GINGHAM ROSE

morning, and she sat a little apart in the shadow by the fireplace, absorbing the young man and the old man, the firelight and the daylight, the leaves of the maple beating against the window outside and the talk beating on the inside, everything and its manner of helping to make up the sense of the stormy day. She focused her eyes on Marr and rested her chin on her hand.

"Do you know you have a forehead like a cathedral dome? I wonder how it happens you have kept so peppery living so long under a dome?"

The coat-tails paused in their flight and the eyes of science were bent curiously on the amused eyes of instinct. "Did you make that up?" he asked lamely.

Anne laughed. "I can never tell about that, you know. I often find the best line I ever wrote in my favorite poet. But," she added lightly, "even if I did make it up, I didn't really."

"Now, what do you mean by that?" asked Science, humbly.

There was curious openness about the look of her as she answered his gaze. "I think," she said quaintly, "that there is some one who lives

A GINGHAM ROSE

in the attic of my heart and the cellar of my brain who, when I now and then have the sense to forget myself, has something rather good to say. I am a very plain person myself," she finished, with a dramatic sigh.

Victor smiled up at Marr. "Don't nag her; let her be," he said. "She's got her 'writing devil' along to-day."

The man of science slipped out of the room and left them as they were: Anne in the shadow seeing things in the fire, Victor seeing Anne, hoping for her things she seldom thought to hope for herself. God above, what a beautiful thing is pure, untried enthusiasm! A flower it is, open to the sun—and the rain.

Outside, by the little window on the landing, the man of science was wiping an unaccountable mist from his glasses.

"I was rusting, as sure as my name is Marr," he smiled. "Little beggar,—I am glad they have come." He got into his rain-coat; he wanted to get out and fight the weather, to walk, to get fresh air, to swing along, free in the big, free world. "Ah," he chuckled to himself, "I wouldn't miss telling Agatha about this for

A GINGHAM ROSE

worlds!" And Agatha, sitting alone in her hotel, in her stiff clothes, stealing a nap from herself, had not the slightest premonition of the approaching enemy.

CHAPTER XIII

Of ugliness—To me there is just as much in
it as there is in beauty.

—WALT WHITMAN.

Marr was received with remote formality, all the subtile blamelessness of a polite snubbing in the air. Agatha Tyler's hand was as limp as she dared to make it, and Agatha was no coward. The chair, permitted rather than proffered, was a triumph of gilt and brocade discomfort. There occurred a round of succinct generalities that bit like bullets; then came the calm before the storm, the silent, gray space tainted with exquisite cynicism. The man of science opened hostilities with a storm of facts.

"Madam," he began, "I have the honor of announcing to you the approaching marriage of your nephew to Miss Anne Preston. Unless there is a relapse, and there seems no occasion to fear the calamity, the wedding will occur in the young man's room in my house next Wednesday morning at half-past eleven o'clock. It

A GINGHAM ROSE

gives me great pleasure to invite you and Miss Gage and Mr. Warren to be present. There will be an informal breakfast. Then in the afternoon they leave for Arizona, where, more than likely, your nephew will live in the future."

The bewildered woman sat staring straight before her, breathless and sense-bereft. She attempted to speak several times, and at last her voice came forth like muffled brass: "Are you able to repeat this ridiculous news?" The four lively eyes were as flint and struck flame in passing. Good fighters they were and this was the encounter awaited for twenty years.

"Certainly," he replied, with the patient smile he was wont to apply to amusing but harmless cases of hysteria.

She rose to her feet and stood with a trembling hand grasping her chair.

"Alexander Marr, if you dare repeat one word I shall ring and have you—" Suddenly she collapsed. "Sit down, Alexander!" she commanded. "You exasperate me beyond endurance with your vagaries." She sank heavily into her chair again. "Now," and she tapped the table beside

A GINGHAM ROSE

her with her small spangled fan, "be good enough to tell me the worst of this disgraceful affair."

"Disgraceful?" and the man's eyes narrowed to a warning.

"In my day," she responded tartly, "a girl had not dared hang about a young man under such circumstances till, in common decency, he was forced to marry her."

"That will do, Madam," he said sternly. "I will ask you to remember that your nephew and Miss Preston have been under my roof."

"Small credit to you," she snapped.

"I was never so proud of anything in my life!"

Agatha Tyler smiled with derision. "We seem no more in danger of agreeing than twenty years ago." She waved her fan. "To my mind the affair is disgraceful."

"The decision does your integrity small justice."

Agatha flushed. "Arguing never was any use between us, Alexander." Her eyes were on her fan, outwardly at least. "Tell me directly

A GINGHAM ROSE

all that you know and I will not interrupt you again—till you have finished,” she added, then bit her lip at the slip and his smile.

“Well, I judge from what I have heard and observed that your nephew has been in love with Anne ever since he first met her. I don’t blame him for that. He is, of course, not well enough to think of marrying under ordinary circumstances; at the same time his state of mental depression will not permit of his being sent away alone. He refuses to go, in fact, without her; says he would rather live a short time here with her, than a long time anywhere else away from her. She is a fascinating young woman, and no mistake. She has a natural skill; her gentleness is a lesson, and her humor a joy. Of course, she may not go with him, except as his wife; custom has done that much for us, and, no doubt, wisely; so, they are to be married on a basis of friendship. It will be simply a contract arrangement.”

“Friendship—fiddlesticks!” retorted Agatha Tyler, the red banners of outrage and embarrassment waving frantically across her strong face. “And when he has recovered, what is to become of this high and mighty ‘friendship’?”

A GINGHAM ROSE

"That, Agatha, is to the best of my belief, entirely their own affair. I will add that I have implicit faith in their common sense."

"Man's talk!" she commented cynically and with a grain of truth. "I agree with you, however, that the girl is perfectly able to take care of herself."

"She is," said Marr, "the first person I have ever met who is capable of true self-sacrifice."

"My nephew is very rich," remarked the woman in a mimic-quiet tone.

Marr fairly thundered: "And if he were ten times very rich he could never repay her for what she is about to do!" He pulled himself together with effort. "Victor is young and of fine fiber. He has his father's sense of honor and is developing a discrimination as fine. Discrimination is valuable, Agatha, in these complex days. Anne, if any one, can lead him back to life; he loves the girl and it is for her he wants to live. He has yet to win the highest type of love from her—if it is the highest—I confess to doubts. But harm seldom comes to build on a foundation of candor. If marriage was oftener based on candor and less often on senti-

A GINGHAM ROSE

mental insanity the world would be the gainer. Have you nothing in your heart, Agatha, that responds to the rare romance in all this? You were not always so deaf to romance." He leaned forward and smiled rather cruelly. "You have changed more than I, Agatha. Why," and his keen face was suffused with glow, "these blessed youngsters have shown me a kind of upliftedness I hadn't dreamed of. Supposing I had gone into my grave without knowing?" He laughed like a boy.

"You always were an enthusiast," she smiled.

"Well," he spread his hands a little sheepishly, "enthusiasm invented automobiles and self-draining flower-pots. It is a kind of propeller!"

"Is Victor likely to recover?" asked Victor's aunt, in a tone modulated by something beneath solicitude.

Marr was a student of modulations and glanced at her shrewdly. "Nearly certain to," he responded with cheer. "He has a fine constitution, is young and hopeful. But at present he demands something more than mere science. He wants sympathy and sunshine: that is why we have chosen Anne to take him to Arizona."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Personally conducted by an heir!" she tossed her head.

Marr laughed in spite of himself. "I believe," he said thoughtfully, "that he will get well because he deserves to. Do you know, Agatha, the older I grow the more I believe that people get what they deserve? You and I have rather missed it along the line of happiness, but that is no reason we need to add the crime of interference to the sin of having blundered. Why, since I have been permitted to know these two high-minded babes I know as I never guessed what my own life has missed. Here was I, blind old fool, walking stubbornly on the brink of things, nearly over, mind you, and with no conception of what a woman could be." The deep old eyes looked through and beyond Agatha's for a moment. Suddenly he stiffened and rose, falling at once into the old formal manner. "Pardon my vagaries; I have taken too much of your time."

"Not at all," she condescended. Then, with her eyes on the little fan: "Marr, is not the disease very contagious? I have read so, it seems to me."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Your solicitude is tardy. That, Agatha, is precisely where the girl's heroism comes in. I have taken good care that they are neither of them blind to the dangers of the situation. I think I mentioned that the marriage is to be entirely civil. Sentimentality is not even invited, you see."

"It is perfectly shocking," she said, dangerously crimson.

"Shocking?" and the old man's eyes twinkled. He stood tracing a big velvet rose in the carpet with his walking stick. "You see, the world has been moving by you and me, and young heads are wiser by a good many years of—enthusiasm! I hope you will all come on Wednesday. We must send them away as cheerfully as possible. I know very well that in spite of all we can do the world is certain to seem a very big place out there in the desert. Will you not make an effort, Agatha, to see the little girl in a kinder light? It is a great many years since I have asked a favor of you."

For a space she wavered, but the crust of time is not to be destroyed in a moment; it must dissolve, bit by bit. The face grew hard, harder

A GINGHAM ROSE

for its pretense. "I think—I am not capable of appreciating heroics."

The stick in Marr's hand drove into the heart of the velvet rose; then he said coldly: "Unless you are able to come in a kindly frame of mind, I beg to suggest that you do not come at all. Will you present my respects to Miss Gage and Mr. Warren, and say to them that I shall be very happy to see them in my house?"

Then, in one of life's saving but absurd returns to formality, the two cantankerous fighters touched hands and bowed, and in an instant the man had gone.

CHAPTER XIV

Wisdom ye winnow from winds that pain me.

—SIDNEY LANIER.

The echo of Marr's retreating step made Agatha's nerves tingle again. She leaned back in her chair trying to readjust her confused faculties.

"Where is Catherine?" she repeated to herself again and again. She felt beaten and alone. "I shall suffocate in this stuffy place," she groaned, striking her hand with her fan. Even the silly furniture seemed to take sides against her. She fumed that she had consented to stay in town after Victor was out of danger. "Catherine, always Catherine!" She was getting rather tired of being left alone with the new novels that John so thoughtfully brought to her, novels that any one could see through to the same sweet end from the very first page, while they were out having a good time. For a while they

A GINGHAM ROSE

had insisted on her going with them. She had always graciously protested, and one day astonishment descended when they did not urge her twice. Since then she might as well have been in town by herself.

She wished with all her heart that Catherine had chosen to marry some sensible, successful gentleman. She did hope all the things she had read and heard about artists were not true, but she had her opinion. "The years are running by you and me, Agatha," danced across her memory and she flushed hotly. Then the door of the elevator flew back with a clang and through the open transom she heard the voices of John and Catherine. She sat up rigid in her black silk dress and the little fan winked and twinkled. In they came, their strong voices and ample young-American manners filling the room to overflowing.

"Such a storm out, Auntie!" smiled Catherine, as John helped her out of her rain-coat. Then she stooped and kissed the woman's unresponsive cheek. "We had a jolly luncheon and you'd have loved the play; so charming!"

"I have been very well occupied with a per-

A GINGHAM ROSE

formance of home talent;" and the spangles whizzed back and forth in streaks of light.

"Only fancy Auntie stage-struck, John," laughed the girl.

"Take off your hat, child, and sit still: do, at least, make a pretense of self-control. And, John, stop staring at me as if my hair were not properly done! You are both noisy enough to shatter one's nerves. I have news," she finished ominously.

"Victor is no worse?" asked the girl, quickly.

Agatha Tyler started out of her chair. "I declare you will be the death of me with your violence. I don't know whom you get it from. Victor is no worse,—in health!" She shut her mouth in the kind of line that says clearly that more might be told if she chose. John stepped directly before her with his arms folded and, with a directness not to be evaded, he asked:

"Is there anything wrong with Victor?"

The spangles paused in amazement, and as she stared back at John the memory of a black-haired girl in an old-fashioned silk dress pricked and goaded her to brevity.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"He is about to be married to your old friend and model, Miss Anne Preston!"

"Anne!" he gasped, then steadied himself against the table. He caught the look of anxiety in Catherine's eye and recovered himself quickly, then gently took her hat out of her hands and stood silent, sticking the long gold pins carefully back into the gorgeous bit of écru and geranium millinery.

"Surely, Auntie, that is not possible," and the girl gazed from her aunt to John. She pushed back her fair hair and straightened her skirts nervously. Somehow she never seemed to count if a third person were by, even "just Auntie." She was made to feel that she wasted time when she spoke, and she knew she was forgotten when she kept silence. Catherine was proud and felt herself wronged.

The woman regarded the girl with remote scorn.

"If you can possibly give me your attention from John for a few moments I will seize the opportunity and tell you what I know."

John's brows drew together and he shot one

A GINGHAM ROSE

frank glance of disgust at the quarrelsome woman. He detested a strident voice. It came to him with new force, that if he and Catherine were to marry, the quicker the better, that she might be taken away from the influence of her not too gentle aunt.

"This afternoon, just after lunch, at an hour when I was nearly certain to be in, the card of that impossible man, Marr, was sent up. I thought, of course, that Victor was worse and permitted him to come up. He came to invite us all to the—ceremony!"

"When is it to be?" asked John.

Agatha Tyler paid not the slightest heed to him.

"The thing is so extraordinary," she continued, "I don't know how to tell you about it, though one should be surprised at nothing from such a girl." A stick of the little fan snapped and impatiently she threw it across the table.

"What you imply is perfectly impossible," said John, and there was about him the kind of dominance-masculine that the weakest man has over the strongest woman, and John was not

A GINGHAM ROSE

weak. "Will you kindly remember that Anne and Victor are both my friends?"

"And will you, young man, kindly remember that Victor is my nephew and that I still have certain family rights which you do not yet share?"

"I am sure, Auntie, that John—" Catherine began timidly.

"Hold your tongue, girl," said the infuriated woman. "Leave the room that I may settle this matter with your 'John' once and for all."

Catherine looked aghast, but John was at her side in a moment.

"Go, dear," he said in a low voice. "Don't mind her. I will tell you all about it afterward." When he had shut the door on Catherine he came back to Mrs. Tyler, and there was about him an irresistible boyishness, a something flatteringly intimate. He had made up his mind to wheedle the truth out of her, if need be, for the truth he must have, and the end justified the wheedling. "Now," he said, "we may talk plainly and with due propriety." He lowered his head to hide his eyes, and, stooping in a fascinating way, he

A GINGHAM ROSE

picked up the discarded little fan. "Broken? Too bad," he said lightly. "Now, do tell me all about it." He sat on the edge of the table beside her and his manner was deferential and attentive.

"Well, *isn't* it too amazing?" and Mrs. Tyler warmed at once to his confidential air.

"I was never more astonished in my life," admitted John, adroitly converting truth to tact.

Agatha hitched her chair nearer and glanced at the door. "You shut the door?"

John nodded.

"Well, then, they are really not to be married at all!"

John looked at her, frankly mystified.

"That is to say, according to the standard of any well brought-up person," she added. "Victor is too ill, of course, poor dear, to see anything in a normal light, and they have persuaded him to have a 'civil marriage,' whatever that means, in the sanatorium, on Wednesday morning. They start for Arizona with a nurse, quite appropriately, in the afternoon. Did you ever hear of such a thing in all your life?"

John was silent, thinking, thinking. "But," he began cautiously, examining the broken fan

A GINGHAM ROSE

to hide the anxiety in his eyes, "isn't the disease very contagious?"

Agatha Tyler blushed to the roots of her gray hair.

"I can scarcely bring myself to talk this over with you. Marr says it is very contagious. They are to be married by contract, on what they call a basis of friendship! It is perfectly certain to end in some sort of scandal! This comes of that awful Art School you all went to. I knew the place could do no good." John's eyes went lower. He was comprehending what hysterics might mean. In order to help him over what she mistook for flustered modesty the woman hurried on volubly. "I believe Victor talks sick, sentimental nonsense about hoping to win her love when he gets well. She has the face not even to pretend she is in love with him! Heaven only knows where this thing is to end."

John got down off the table and laid aside the little fan with the peculiar care that goes with skilled hands and an absent mind. The moment he got the information he wanted he cast aside all thought of the irascible old woman, who eyed him back with a growing alarm. Then, just as

A GINGHAM ROSE

Marr had done, he took his stick and stood tracing the pattern in the carpet.

"I must, of course, see Anne at once," he said.

"She is altogether alone, and I am not at all sure she realizes the sacrifice she is making. She was always impulsive and generous to a fault. Will you say to Catherine that I shall be back at nine o'clock, and we will talk all this over together?"

He was gone before she could collect herself for an answer.

"Catherine, Catherine!" she cried. "Come here at once!" The girl hurried in. "What do you think has happened now?" she said.

"Where is John?" asked the bewildered girl. "Auntie, have you sent John away? If you have, I'll never forgive you to the longest day I live!" She stood to her last inch and was almost beautiful in her fair pride.

"Humph!" and the woman looked at the girl with admiration. "I am glad to know you have some spirit, after all. John has gone to that little black-headed minx, and I doubt very much if you ever see him again!" She swept into her bedroom, the gay, broken, little, spangled toy glittering in her hand.

CHAPTER XV

Science writes of the world as if with the cold finger of a starfish; it is all true; but what is it when compared to the reality of which it discourses?

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

"Is Miss Preston here?" asked John Warren of the maid who responded to his ring at the sanatorium door.

"I will ask Doctor Marr, sir. She usually leaves at six o'clock."

John glanced at his watch and went into the waiting-room. As the maid was leaving the room he called to her, "Will you take my card to Doctor Marr instead of Miss Preston?"

"Certainly, sir," responded the unimpressible maid, moving colorlessly down the hall. She tapped on the office door and entered.

Marr was sitting with his back to the light and the usual accompaniment of papers about him. He bent his head and read the card with

A GINGHAM ROSE

his mouth down at the corners. Instantly the quiet of the office was turned topsy-turvy.

"Confound the pack o' 'em," he groaned. "I've had all I can stand for one day. I won't see him!" He buried himself in his paper.

"He seemed right nervous, sir," remarked the unimpressible maid, dispassionately. "He asked for Miss Preston first, sir; then before I had fixed the shades proper, that quick, sir, he changed his mind and asked for you instead?" The art of suggestion blossoms in the perfect maid: seeing all, remembering nothing; telling all, saying nothing. "What shall I say, sir?" she asked as freshly as if she had but entered the room.

"Say nothing!" groaned the man. "I'll say it myself. Go upstairs and ask Miss Preston not to leave the house till I come up. And say nothing of who is down here."

"Certainly, sir," and noiselessly she climbed up the stairway, knocked, and entered. "The doctor says that Miss Preston will not leave the house till he comes up. He will be up as soon as he has finished with the young man in the reception-room."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Anne, I'll bet anything John is down there. Poor old Marr, he's getting an overdose of us. Who was the young man?" Victor asked the maid.

"I didn't read the card, sir," she said apathetically.

"You didn't, hey?" laughed Victor. "Now that's a pity. You should always read the card. What are you here for? You might as well go on if you have nothing to tell." He settled back among his pillows.

"He seemed excited, sir." And the maid noiselessly departed.

"Why, Vic, you crosspatch!" laughed Anne. Just the same, her heart was thumping and she sat down to wait as patiently as possible for the doctor.

Meantime Marr moved down the hall with his chin set and senses keyed to oppose John Warren. The young man was about to marry Agatha Tyler's niece; that, it seemed, pointed him to be either a great fool or a great knave.

The two men stood observing each other for an exceptionally frank moment. It was their first meeting face to face. Each displayed a

A GINGHAM ROSE

keen but finely-clothed attentiveness. "Stronger than I expected," mused the older man. "Thoroughbred to the bone," sighed the younger man. Anne had strong allies. Then occurred a businesslike hand-clasp; the doctor offered John a chair, faced him in another.

"Doctor Marr," John began, "I know that your time is more than full, so I shall be brief. Will you tell me as much as you may about this affair between Miss Preston and Mr. Stetson? I have been treated to Mrs. Tyler's version, but it was scarcely—unprejudiced." The men exchanged as broad a smile as good breeding permits its lords of creation at the expense of one of its ladies: a smile delicately amused, exquisitely satirical, and comfortably dead at birth. John had easily guessed from Mrs. Tyler's fury the enmity between her and the doctor, and Marr, whose pastime was analysis, watched John play the card with an inward smile.

"She is a stern woman," the old man remarked with his head back and the tips of his long fingers together.

"She has—opinions," admitted John, and instantly, by a shade that slipped over Marr's face,

A GINGHAM ROSE

he was made to feel that three words more than enough had been said at the lady's expense. John mentally raged at himself, but acknowledged his superior. The finely-seasoned old gentleman stood for the quality John's creed of conduct held highest, a quality that he himself just missed. Alexander Marr was no sham; he never thought about the "right thing to do," he did it.

"It is true, then," John hastened over the gulf, "that they are to be married on Wednesday?"

"True," Marr inclined his head, "by the law of contract."

Honest concern dragged John for one honest moment out of the mud of self-consciousness, and he retorted: "You and I know well enough that that is as binding as any other marriage. All the surpliced choirs and benedictions on earth can make it no more binding, no more a fact."

Marr sat up. "That's right, of course. But, with the added understanding between the two and the honor of Victor's word, it is more possible, more appropriate, more frank."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Is it all quite—fair to Anne?" John asked with honest anxiety.

"I'm damned if I know," and Marr brought his hands down on the arms of his chair with nervous tenacity.

"Does Anne realize all that she is possibly giving up?" John pursued.

"Giving up?" Marr raised his eyebrows. Then settling easily back in his chair he polished his glasses a moment and peered at John through them. "I have for a great many years been rather vitally mixed up with other people's affairs, but I have never given myself the luxury of discussing them from an ethical point of view. Of course, you are in love with the little girl, too; who is not?" he laughed. "But may I not send her down to you? She will tell you just what she cares to have you know, I am sure."

John was crimson. "I am to be married to Miss Gage in October," he said, feeling absurd enough.

"So I have heard," commented the doctor, with his long fingers patiently together again. "Well, the distribution of genius seems about right: one to a family. Anne Preston, the little

A GINGHAM ROSE

baggage, has upset all of my hard-earned theories about women. She possesses a quality—if I didn't know better, I'd call it scientific intuition—and," he laughed, "who ever heard of such a thing as that? She convinces me of the established impossible. She has the delightful eagerness that blunders and gets itself loved. The impossible feminine is always so much more convincing than the impossible masculine," he smiled, and his glance held another paradox that left John fairly stripped. "She is very talented," he continued easily. "It is amazing. I read a story of hers the other day, a concise little bit that hinged on a scientific question. I asked where she got her information and she had the audacity to say, 'Out of the dictionary.' She is very refreshing."

"I am glad," said John, carefully, "that this will at least put her in a position where she will be free from pot-boiling. If she is not interrupted in her work—" John flushed to hear himself repeating the text of Anne's old sermons to himself.

Marr scowled and ran his hands impatiently over his hair. "It irritates me intensely that she

A GINGHAM ROSE

has ever had that sort of thing to do. I assure you she shall not suffer again. If it were not for Victor's prior claim I'd do my best to adopt her. She is so proud I don't at all know that she would let me."

"You are an enthusiast," murmured John, absently.

"Humph!" smiled Marr. "Since you and Mrs. Tyler both say so, I must be. But I hope I am discriminating. The fact is, young man, we are all, by nature, barnacles, and without something to fasten our faith to we miss our best possible destinies."

"May I see Miss Preston a few moments?" John asked. Armchair philosophy was unendurable just now.

"If she wishes." Marr rose at once. John got to his feet. "I shall tell her you are here. And I shall not expect an answer to my invitation till after you talk with her. I have no desire to know her affairs except when I may help her. She has been silent thus far, but I believe she will be perfectly frank with you."

"Naturally," said John, solicitously, "I realize that it is awkward for her."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Awkward?" Marr paused, frankly mystified. "No woman ever had less reason to feel awkward, Mr. Warren. Good afternoon."

John was left with his thoughts for diversion and did not find himself well entertained. He was overwhelmed with the knowledge that Anne had risen out of his sphere of consideration; he found her wrapped about and protected with the very thing he had chosen Catherine to gain; only, somehow, this was a better sort of thing; it held all that Catherine possessed and had, besides, an impregnable beauty of repose. He was baffled and drenched in a wave of clear vision that revealed himself beaten. He would have fled the house had he dared, but he had not the courage of frank cowardice.

Marr found Anne sitting with her hat and gloves on and her jacket across her knees. Victor looked pale and tired. The unimpressible maid had succeeded in breeding uneasiness. The man of science stepped to one side where he could watch the two of them. There was about him the refined cruelty of the physician who is convinced that he must, once for all, cut through feeling to justify fact.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"John Warren is downstairs and wishes to speak with Anne," he said uncompromisingly.

Victor and Anne both rose and their eyes questioned and answered silently. "I shall see him, of course," she said faintly.

"Of course she will," sighed Victor, leaning back on his pillows. "We are all getting nervous, it seems to me; getting excited about a visit from John. It is only a wonder that he hasn't been in oftener."

Anne's mouth twitched satirically. "But, you see, Vic, he is as good as a member of your family now. No one ever knows his own family: it's heaps safer not."

Marr came to the girl's side. He rested his hand shyly on her shoulder.

"Will you take off your hat and gloves, Anne? I should like it if you seemed to be in your own home with Warren." Impulsively she rested her cheek on his hand.

"Thank you," she said and laid her hat aside.

"There now," and he ventured to smooth her hair lightly, delighting in his own daring. "I'll stay up here with Victor."

"I shall not be long," she said firmly.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Anne," said Marr, "of course it is none of my business, but if I may suggest, I'd say it all at once and have it over with."

"You are quite right," answered Anne, and she closed the door softly.

Marr dropped into the chair by Victor's couch. He sat with his eyes closed; he was tired; the day had meant much to him, both for himself and for the "youngsters."

"Something in the air, Stetson?" he asked with a candor that disarmed curiosity.

"That is just the way I feel," admitted Victor. "What is the matter with the lot of us? Well, Anne will clear things up."

"Are you particularly fond of Warren?" asked Marr.

"Why, yes," said Victor, slowly. "I have a habit of being, you know. I've known him a long time. I confess I don't understand him any more."

"He was indirect with me. I do not like that. It is a feminine quality: charming in a woman and damnable in a man."

"Anne'll tell us all about it," said Victor, confidently. "But," he added firmly, "not unless she

A GINGHAM ROSE

cares to. She shall keep her affairs to herself as much as she likes."

"Oh, of course, of course," and Marr crossed and uncrossed his long legs and lazily repeated a bit of interesting news he had heard during the day.

CHAPTER XVI

——, released and aware:

What was gone, what remained? All to traverse
"Twixt hope and despair.

—BROWNING.

All men and women, according to their capacity to suffer, stand, at one time or another, fascinated, on the brink of some eddying, sucking undertow; stand transfixed, with eyes wide but not for seeing. Here and there a venturesome one plunges deliberately, is whirled and tumbled, derided and half-drowned, dragged down and nearly broken, tossed for spite like a bauble high on the sands, left there to gasp and struggle ridiculously for the footing he himself discarded. And these make useful men and women, sympathetic, too, diplomaed in the school of humility; but the price of their understanding is to go through the rest of life bravely hiding scars and wearing always a look of having faced the light.

Anne moved down the stairway like a dreamer;

A GINGHAM ROSE

spirit alert, body benumbed. In all the darkness shone one star: the gaunt honesty of the old man of science. She felt sheltered, felt thankful that this last talk with John was to occur under his roof. She saw her fate managed by accident; she knew she would be true to the friendly old man where she might have failed in being true to herself. And during all the summer, especially these last hard weeks—mere “accident,” mere “fate,” she thought—she had been forging a suit of armor for her courage.

She was learning—the story-builder’s trick—to read her own experiences as she would read a book by some masterful unknown. She was sincere; she took the pages as they came; she worried very little about how the story was “coming out”; she was graciously saved all the labor of invention; she was allowed to look on rather than forced to live. So she put aside the curtain that separated her from John with a gay little fraud of a smile; surely she would be rarely well amused with to-day’s page in her book of accidents, watching herself through a crisis! But there is something of doom in the dumb, thick, irrevocable fall of heavy velvet, and as the gray

A GINGHAM ROSE

folds dropped behind her, shut her in with John, the tawdry little smile died its death in the poison of an honest sigh.

"A turn and we stand in the heart of things."

Anne was face to face with John—she had thought it was for the last time; it seemed to them both to be the first.

Stubbornly she gazed at him. He was, after all, only John Warren, whom she knew better than he knew himself. Her mouth curled with self-scorn, and she asked herself why she was afraid.

As for John, his senses were at war. He saw how her eyes seemed to gather all the twilight to themselves, how she seemed at one with the quiet place, then by some by-path of sense came a messenger that told him the girl had suffered, was tired out and heart-sick and, everything else forgotten, the best of him swept out to her. "Anne, dear, you are tired out. Come here!" He held his arms out to her.

Anne stood staring with eyes wide, "but not for seeing." All her lonely life she had been craving sympathy from some one who understood

A GINGHAM ROSE

her, who could, by the best in himself, read the best in her. During these last baffling weeks she had had sympathy every way she turned. Marr, Victor, the nurses, the maids she passed on the stairway, every one was kind, but it was because they looked on her as a sort of child, who must be pitied. And now, here was John, standing with outstretched arms; John, bad as she believed his motives to be, sham that she knew him. John, who, say what one might, was still John. John, who by the something in himself, could read the something in her. She tottered and John started toward her, then resentment, honesty, fate knows what, rose in her like a flood and she clung like mad to her chosen future. She raised her hands and proudly brushed the hair back from her forehead, and, because the whirling force had flung her so far inland, her voice came harsh and unfamiliar.

"Why, yes," she said, ignoring his hands and moving over to the chair the doctor had left, "I am rather tired, but one gets over that. I seemed to be the only one of Victor's friends that had the time to give for—getting tired." Cynicism was helping her rapidly back to her laugh,

A GINGHAM ROSE

and in that she saw safety, knew herself to be strong.

"Anne," John faltered, "I am sure you are generous enough to see how this has been very awkward for me."

"No," she said firmly, "I do not see. I have got rather tired, John, of being generous at my own expense. It seldom pays, you know. I see that it is awkward, but I see, too, that the awkwardness has been entirely of your own making."

"Perhaps I should not have come."

"It would have been less awkward had you come a long time ago." She motioned him to take the chair. For a while the room was given over to silence. Self-conscious people prefer any sort of noise to silence, so it was John who spoke first.

"All this news is true, then?"

"Yes, all true," she smiled uncompromisingly. There was something remote, almost puritanical about her head with its rim of black hair and the white, clear-eyed face against the tapestry of the high-backed chair. John looked and paid the price of the man who has dared treat beauty as a science.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Is it quite—right?" he questioned, and, because he was struggling, he chose the wrong words. He seemed to have started all wrong, but his vanity, bruised and shaken as it was, whispered to him that things were not fair, that something unjust was keeping him from doing his best.

"Right!" and the echo of his word bore all the scorn she felt.

"Will you tell me about it?" he asked, trying for new ground.

"I am sure, John, that you have been told. Is it," and she bent forward and smiled into his eyes curiously, "that you are a little cruel? that you want to watch me while I recite the harrowing details of my *martyrdom*?"

"But, you *know* it is not that," he urged.

"I assure you, John, that I know nothing in the world. I was very wise not long ago, even as I came downstairs to you just now; very wise!" She laughed. "Now, John, listen, for I am going to tell you all about it. I have never felt for any one the kind of affection I feel for Victor; I have never in my life known any one who deserved affection as he does. Why, think

A GINGHAM ROSE

of it! He is never so happy as when he can find some little thing to give up for me, for my happiness and my comfort. Can you imagine it? It is wonderful and beautiful. You see, I thought, until Victor came back, that there was no such thing as unselfishness in all the wide world. You know, John, how alone I am; it is nearly absurd being so alone in such a 'big world,' so full of people, is it not? But, John, have you noticed how even the absurdly small things are not allowed to stay alone for ever?

"So, the mite has been discovered, taken in, clothed and fed, and loved—God knows why—but even loved! I'd have gone to Arizona as Victor's nurse had it been possible, but all these people in this big world will have no such thing, and the mite had been smaller and more alone than ever before in the end; and because the friends of the mite are so generous, the sacrifice is not permitted. So we are to be married by the law of contract, and contracts, as you know, dabble very little in sentimentality. But as for sentiment,—the contract is fairly steeped in it! A paradox, is it not, John? But you know nothing is really true that refuses to be made over

A GINGHAM ROSE

into a paradox; and this is all very true." As she talked the pain crept through her voice till John thought he must cry out. Again she laughed and watched him shrewdly. "Are you and Catherine and your Aunt Agatha coming?"

"I can't say until I have seen them," he said. He was dazed.

"Stupid John," she said lightly; "why don't you take your revenge? Don't you see that *I* am marrying Aunt Agatha, too?"

Anger flushed John's face till in his discomfiture his smooth hair and conventional, self-possessed collar and tie produced an effect of preposterous opposition between the man and the man's garb. "You have a talent, Anne, for making me seem clumsy. Besides," his voice was thick, "I had scarcely thought it a time for joking!"

"John, tell me, do you really think that anything human ever rose to a point above being a joke?" Her eyes grew hard as she read his anger. "Things have changed between you and me now. You used to mold me nearly as you liked. But that was all before you lost your

A GINGHAM ROSE

power through being untrue to Catherine and to me."

John got to his feet. The blood was beating in his ears. He could almost have struck her. "You are absolutely unjust!"

"I think not." The girl rose, too. "John Warren, the something between you and me is not quite dead, maybe never would die of itself; but it is not good, and sometimes when things are not good and refuse to die they must be killed. Do, John," she pleaded, "look me in the face just once, be frank, and help me! It is the only thing we can do, and it may mean so much to us all the rest of our lives!"

"*I help you!*" and there was an ugly sneer in John's laugh and his face grew coarse. "Yes, Anne Preston, there is a something between us, you are right! And it is not to be killed! It will die when we do and not before. I tell you there is a something about you that answers true to a something about me, that is all mine, and, no matter whom you marry, no matter whom I marry, no matter where we go, you will come back some day when I call you! You dare not deny it with all your pride; you are mine!"

A GINGHAM ROSE

The girl recoiled in terror and, absurd again, her head hit the edge of a picture-frame and the trifling smart courageously saved the crisis. Fate playing with another accident! She turned and straightened the frame carefully, steadying her shaking hands. She glanced up to see, to get food for her frightened mind. It was a portrait of Carlyle. She laughed.

"He'd have made an epigram out of our mimic heroics and his dyspepsia, would he not, John? We are acting like babies!" she turned on him. "I do hope we both have sense enough to meet a situation we have made for ourselves. We must, for Catherine and for Victor, if self-respect is not enough. But, John, if you are able to arrange it with tact, I believe it will be better if you do not bring our aunt," she sighed, "to the—performance! Ruth will be back, I hope; if not, Doctor Marr and Miss Evans, the nurse, will do as witnesses."

John laughed. "I understand you are being appropriately sent away in the care of a nurse!"

Anne stood straight and white. "Will you go now, at once?"

CHAPTER XVII

Ghosts! Oh, breathing beauty.

—BROWNING.

So Fate paces by, serene and terribly light of touch, fitting her foot noiselessly into the nick of time; damning with a word of praise, transforming and lifting with a curse, making nothingness blossom; on she goes, unvarying of pace, and with an intricate irony in her smile.

The clang of the door that shut John out of the house and away from Anne sent her staggering against the wall again, and even old Carlyle with his tragical humor could not save. She was, by the grace of fate, face to face with herself, confronted with a pretty, human bit of fabric that seemed in the flash of light to be woven of nothing but lies and self-deception and conceit.

She loathed and wondered at her frailty. Could all this last hour be true? Was she herself real flesh and blood? Was everything after all a hopeless masquerade? She dropped her hands

A GINGHAM ROSE

and gazed curiously about the gray-walled room in the deepening twilight. A cloud like a curtain of gauze seemed to drop over the face of things. The room with its array of portraits seemed a stage, and she was a ghost with the rest.

Her eyes sought the eyes of the old engravings with a fantastic intimacy. Kant was there, Spinoza, Darwin, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Voltaire and the rest, her host's familiars. They smiled back on her so shrewdly, it was as if she and they had a joke in common if some one could *just* speak it! Then in the vibrating veil of gauze they seemed to descend from their frames, the wan light shining through the lines of the engraver like evening through a lattice. They ranged in quaint row, polishing their glasses, and peering at her through the gauze, amused, concerned, amused. And suddenly in their midst appeared John! John, marvelously new and done over into a drawing by himself, stumbling along in the tattered rags of his own technic! And in his hands, for the inevitable note of color, he carried a great flushed rose!

A GINGHAM ROSE

The ghostly troop gathered about him with mild curiosity. They stepped gingerly lest they tread on the trailing lines that clogged his steps like ball and chain. "Oddly rendered," they murmured with glances at one another. "'Tis a way of the times, no doubt."

John, with a gravity so heavy it seemed it must needs break, held out his rose for a verdict.

They sniffed it, they touched the thorns on the long, slender stem with the delicacy that comes of knowledge, and they smiled. Then, horror of horrors! one there was who plucked a petal and held it sternly between his thumb and finger and put it beneath a little glass he wore for a fob.

Said another, "It hath a pleasant smell."

"True," nodded yet another with a twinkle in his eye. "'Tis a pleasant thing to look upon. 'Tis bravely garbed."

"Humph!" laughed the one with the glass and the petal. "'Tis as I supposed; 'tis no real rose: it bleeds! I have proved that it bleeds!" He held a ghostly thumb up for inspection and on it was a tiny red spot.

A GINGHAM ROSE

They gathered about with a flutter of mild, amused curiosity. "Odd conceit," they babbled. "A rose that bleeds!"

"Tee-hee," chuckled one with a long, thin nose. "The conceit, if odd, likes me well! 'Twill play a devilish pretty part as it dances across to the wings, eh, William?" and he stuck a long, tickling ghost-finger into the ribs of another.

"Aye, that it will," sighed he of the ribs, wincing and edging away from the finger.

"Old fools!" thundered John, flinging the rose under his feet, where it got tangled with the trailing lines. "I tell you, you are all wrong. Fossils! It's a *gingham* rose!" And from his whole body dripped lines of "technic" instead of blood, though he suffered and suffered.

"Ah," smiled the one with the petal between his thumb and finger. "You think so? I shall preserve this petal and some day you'll come round without your harness and see for yourself!"

"Fools, eh?" laughed he of the long, thin nose, lightly. "It is praise to be called fools by a fool. Be gone!" Each ghostly finger pointed toward the door. "Silly sketch of a man," they

A GINGHAM ROSE

laughed and laughed, "go out into the world and learn what it means to be a good old engraving!"

Somewhere a door clanged again and Anne found herself with her eyes fixed on a rose in the patterned carpet. With a start and a shudder, she groped her way along the darkened hall to the stairway and on up to Victor's room. She had no idea how long she had been down there. She ran into the room quickly and shut the door behind her. The light dazed her and she stood staring like one just wakened from sleep.

Victor and Marr both rose and waited for her to speak. She felt dumb, could think of nothing to say. But the look of Victor, standing with his hands grasping the edge of the table, and with the strong light etching his illness so clearly, stung her to self-recovery. She realized that she had come back to the way she had chosen, this time for good, and she must speak as the need of the time dictated.

It was easier, perhaps, than to tell the truth! She looked up into Marr's eyes and laughed. "Were you ever afraid of ghosts?" she asked.

A GINGHAM ROSE

The old man, for some reason, chose to take her seriously. "Perhaps," he admitted. "Sit down, Stetson; she is all right," he said to Victor. He stood smoothing his watch in his long hand. "Do you know, young man, we have about worn the little girl out among us. She is all nerves. Now, we must try to make amends. She is to be our guest to-night, and we'll see what we can do."

Anne shook her head. "They'll be worried about me."

"I'll send a telegram," said Marr, and he hung her hat and coat up in Victor's closet and put the key in his pocket. "It was my fault, I suppose, that the ghosts and spooks were abroad. I, idiot for tact that I am, told the maid not to disturb you with lights. We'll go out there and turn them all on full, now," he smiled, "but, Anne, I've an idea everybody has to deal with his own ghosts in the end."

"I know it," she answered, turning the idea over and over. "It wouldn't be so difficult, would it, if they would just wear their labels outside?" The old man seemed nearly as misty and spiritry

A GINGHAM ROSE

as the ghosts she had left downstairs and she wondered if she were losing her wits.

"No, it wouldn't," he admitted. Then for a space these two quaintly-turned natures stood with their troops of ghosts acknowledged between them.

And Victor? He was forgotten, and left out; and he knew it. He knew it just as Catherine knew that she was left out when there was some one else by to talk to John. But Victor hoped, for he understood, though he had no voice; and poor Catherine had still to gain understanding.

"But," Marr laughed a little consciously, "that is no reason why we won't be getting hungry. I must descend to the realm of the cook. We'll have our dinner up here. Now, Anne, you young porcupine, you curl up in that chair and don't you budge till I get back. You are not to frighten my patient out of his senses with any more ghost-stories; and no more dreams either, mind you. I'll be a half-hour, perhaps," and he hurried out with the half-gay, half-sad activity of a generous heart too long held back.

"Vic," she said contritely, as she settled into

A GINGHAM ROSE

the depths of the chair, "you look as white as if you'd been seeing ghosts, too. I'm so sorry. It's all very well to scare myself with my play-acting, but I've no business scaring you and Doctor Marr, too."

Impulsively Victor turned his eyes full on hers. "Anne," he asked low, "do you still care for John?"

"Victor!" she gasped. "How can you think such a thing!" The lie crushed her pride, but she saw it as the only way. "John and I quarreled to-day," she said slowly. "I had not meant to tell you about it, but, perhaps, if you know, it will be best. I don't believe anything will ever make it right. I lost my respect for him, nearly for myself. Please let's forget him." At that moment Fate sent one of her intricate smiles and told the girl that women by no means always respect the thing they love. Truly her ghosts were walking to-night. She sighed to see herself chained to them for all the rest of her days, doing their grim bidding. One thing she resolved upon finally. Victor should never guess she cared for John, not if she lied her soul away to keep him from it.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Poor Catherine!" said Victor, absently. "I wish something would interfere with their marriage."

"I have said as much to John," sighed Anne.

Victor turned his eyes upon her with a curious gaze. "Don't talk any more, girlie. You are tired out and need to rest. Go to sleep a while. Brave little Nancy!" he smiled and shut his eyes.

Anne impulsively put out her hand and rested it on his. The big palm turned and closed about hers completely. The impulse by, she wondered vaguely if there is more of irritation in the sense of physical mastery or more of comfort in the idea of security and protection. She half closed her eyes and watched him furtively. His face was very white, but his hand was reassuringly warm.

The whiteness was curious: it repelled her while it woke her pity anew; it was almost the white of the thick waxy lily, the white of renunciation. Victor had had a glimpse into his own limitations, but she did not know that. She tried dreamily to remember the legend of how the lilies had paid for their wonderful pallor. The delicious sense of the onlooker was upon her

A GINGHAM ROSE

again; she was afloat in the world of her own fancies; her head pressed closer and closer to the arm of the chair, and she slept.

When Marr came in, Victor raised a hand in warning. The old man moved up softly. He spoke in the physician's voice that somehow never disturbs.

"What a baby she is! a wise baby, Stetson. Too wise for her own happiness. Have you ever noticed, young man, how much more worn an old face is in sleep and how much more youthful a young face? It takes death in the absolute to wipe out the difference. I have my paper," he nodded. "The maid will be in to set the table in a moment. It won't waken her," he smiled. He drew his chair into the circle of light. The place was silent. And always Victor watched Anne, and there was in his eyes both a great hunger and the strength to starve like a man if he must.

CHAPTER XVIII

Most progress is most failure. Thou sayest well.

—BROWNING.

The clang of the door that shut Anne in with her ghosts sent John reeling down the sanatorium steps dazed and humiliated. He could not force order among his clamoring senses. Anne—Anne Preston—had ordered him from the house, and he had obeyed her like a whipped dog. He was blind and dumb with self-contempt. From the moment he had entered Marr's house things had conspired against him. In certain rooms of this world, before certain people of this world, a man inevitably is at his worst.

The old scholar, with his slim, high-bred make, and the actuality, the unconscious repose of his home had delivered John over to a look at himself, had overwhelmed him with a sudden nausea for his studio with its artificially dim light, its stained wood walls and affected high

A GINGHAM ROSE

shelf burdened with useless brass and pewter. He saw with horror his own veneer, the same tepid stain that masked the cheap pine boards. Silly, unsubstantial, meaningless, and sick, for once he recognized himself.

And what disaster had wrought the change in Anne? The frail-willed girl he had been used to bend as he liked. Was she blaming him for that night in the park? He had meant to smooth it over, to make it easy for her, by ignoring it. He had put up with her frankness with much patience.

Suddenly other scales fell from his eyes, and he saw that the old frankness had been robbed of its sting and had been served to him steeped in the honey that subtly praises and pronounces worthy censure, given because she cared so much. The glimpse wrenched him from the thick habit of believing that she did and would always depend on him, expect strength of him—in a way—all her life long, come what might. In his dreams he had always seen himself with a certain pathos outliving all his acquaintances, profiting by their experiences. All at once he

A GINGHAM ROSE

saw the millions that had never seen him. He passed his shaking hand across his forehead in self-pity and protested that he had always meant to help her in some way, especially in placing her work, but after she had proved herself. John reveled in the hard, selfish doctrines of desolate justice.

To-day he had stumbled, but he had been exasperated beyond endurance. Vanity, John's best friend, a friend so cherished that he had kept her under glass, had broken loose, and though she flung him a word in her old soothing way now and then, she walked just before, hand in hand with his real self, and as he watched furtively he saw them hiding a laugh. With a swerve to the old way she whispered that except for Marr he would have been master. But vanity was ill and could not speak for long at a time. She failed to convince him of anything but one fact—Anne had been in earnest.

He walked down to his club, habit taking the place of inclination. Once there he awoke with a dread of meeting men he knew: perhaps they knew him. He went to the reading-room and

A GINGHAM ROSE

hid behind a paper. Composure was written in illuminated letters at the top of John's creed of conduct and he struggled to get it back.

"Well, I never!" some one laughed back of the paper barricade. Three faces that had some way grown unfamiliar peered over the top of the paper. "Ruffled, old man? Our little friend Warren reading the morning paper at seven in the evening and upside down at that!"

John gulped and smiled and half got to his feet, but they moved away with a laugh.

Said one: "Warren's given up morning papers because of the evening quality." Said another: "They go better with candle-light, you know." In the door they paused and laughed again. "Come along, Warren. Smooth your plumage and eat a steak!" But no one waited and no one really cared.

He put down the paper and gazed stupidly about. So, here in his club, their club, too, were the same sham walls and cheap effects, tones that were timid shadows of real color. Even the pewter and brass caught the light in just the proper way, everything arranged and studied, and spread over with self-conscious gray to befool

A. GINGHAM ROSE

age and usage. And these men were worse than he: they did not respect it nor believe in it, but they put up with it because it was easier than to revolt. He got to his feet and left the place with his head up. He would go to a restaurant and dine, go to some place where the chairs were made to sit on—not to be looked at; where he paid for what he got when he got it.

He walked down Broadway and resolutely turned in at the first restaurant that caught his eye. He was not hungry, but, because it seemed the quickest way to get rid of the waiter who was reading his life through the back of his head while he hesitated, he ordered dinner. Some one had said something about steak; that would do; it did not matter what. He smoothed his hair with his hands and as he raised his head a high light on a bit of polished brass caught and twinkled at his eyes. Destruction began brewing within him. Every way he looked—Dutch stuff, stained wood, high shelf, pewter plates, and this time rendered truly absurd in a glare of electric lights.

What is this malady, he asked himself, creeping about the city, this sham with a Dutch

A GINGHAM ROSE

mien? A woman with a gray-haired man rustled by the table and her clothes and manner echoed Paris. He put his hands over his hot eyes and tried to think of something genuinely American. Anne's eyes looked back at him fearlessly. He knew now what she had meant when she had said that his was, she supposed, the "nice" kind of room he "believed in having." John saw that his pedestal had grown so tall because he had used cheap material. The fall was long and hard. He wanted to be free of the whole tangle, to take a fresh start, to be in earnest and honest. He left the place and got out into the street.

At the door a girl in a big hat was talking with a frank-faced man. "Come on," said the man, "we'll get dinner in here." "Not much," said the girl with a toss of her hat. "All the hay-seeds from Jersey is in there seein' the sights. I don't want a place to look at. I've seen 'em before. I want somethin' to eat."

"Well," sighed John, as he walked along, "she has more sense than I had. She knows what she wants. 'Something to eat!'" He wandered up and down the street, half-blind, hurt and

A GINGHAM ROSE

adrift. He was bewildered by the gleam of the shop-windows, the sparkle-eyed fun of the passing throng. He was an alien, had nothing in common with anything.

The rain had cleared and the streets were clean and transparent, glassy. Above the curiously metallic city-life gleamed a still, clean sky spotted with cool evening stars. His eyes and senses were drawn out of focus in the steadiness of his gaze. He saw little, lonesome, tottering individuals rushing after expensive fun; hurrying cabs, and persisting cars; all caught in a passion of activity and trivial thoroughness. Truth herself made the etching with her quick point on his brain. He felt the soul in every detached mystified specter; knew that, do as he would, he was but another pitifully hoping and smiling ghost, all-enveloped and whirling in a never-lifting, invisible fog; a great blind heart, caught by a buffeting current.

Doggedly he went to his studio, a purpose growing and rising, a strength he neither would nor could discuss with himself. He went to the center of the room and gazed about the place. He had never really seen it before. He got

A GINGHAM ROSE

his pipe off the shelf and lighted it, then stood back looking about and letting his fury go. All at once the hate ran over and, like a madman for strength, he snatched down the pewter and brass and flung it on the floor in a heap. The light from the streets caught with a faint redness on the metals and irritated him terribly, and with a rush he tore down a raw silk curtain and covered the heap. It looked like some dead thing lying there. He laughed as he looked, like an imbecile over a secret. He marched to the window and threw it wide for air. His hand touched something cool and the pungency of the geranium reached his senses. With a groan he trailed his fingers along the stout little stems.

He had no idea how long he had stood there when he remembered Catherine. Poor little girl!—one of the blindest of the puppets in the globe. He went to his desk and mechanically lighted a candle. It twinkled at him as, with a new rush of anger, he flung it across the room. It hit a chair, spluttered, rolled out of the brass stick and fell to the floor. He lighted the gas, every jet in the place, turning them all on as

A GINGHAM ROSE

far as they would go. Life was to begin all over again, without quarter. He must tell Catherine the truth. Cost what it might to them both now, if he let it go on it would be but a heavier debt to meet in the end.

After he had written his letter, he went into his bedroom and took her picture off the shelf and wrapped it and addressed it to her. Then he went outside to post them before thinking should have time to make a compromising coward of him again. The place fell into a stillness as if the city light were sitting up with the dead thing on the floor. Something was wrenched off the door and John came in and flung a big brass knocker on the pile. He turned out the gas and went into his room. He put Anne's photograph in the center of the shelf and looked at it a long time.

He knew now that he had never understood her. All at once his head sank down till his forehead rested on his arms. "Nancy," he whispered, "don't laugh at me like that!" He raised his head stubbornly. "You have got to help me whether you will or not."

CHAPTER XIX

And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.

—BROWNING.

After dinner Marr took Anne and Victor to his library: it was the best he had to offer, and good enough.

"Oh," sighed Anne, standing in the center of the room by the desk, "it is my air-castle come true!"

Marr and his workshop were at one. Books, old and new, of yesterday and to-day, light and heavy, on desk, shelves, chairs and floor, in delightful, clean disorder. The desk was of beautiful wood and fitted with strong, useful things, tools in earnest, no waste but amplitude. The girl moved slowly about the room, letting her sympathetic fingers linger over a volume or a bit of finely turned metal work, and last she approached Marr and rested her hand lightly on his sleeve with the same reverence.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Victor was leaning back in a great leather chair, watching the two with real enjoyment. "You fit the place nearly as well as the doctor, Nancy. You look like the spirit of some old Botticelli 'springtime' come to life. Ten to one Marr has never heard of Botticelli, but he had all the science and something besides, didn't he? —the something Anne looks like in the old room here."

"Young man," said Marr, seriously, "you have hit the very thought I brought you in here to find. You and I have a charge in this youngster," and he patted Anne's hand. "Now, sit down, child." He put her into a chair and sat with his head on his hand by his desk, the strong lamplight making him a study that set Victor's fingers tingling. "I must, I insist upon having the floor for once," he finished, laughing.

"For once?" Anne raised her brows satirically.

The man looked her over curiously and absently.

Anne wriggled. "Don't! You make me feel like a specimen."

"Anne, it is just that spirit you have, that polite impudence; what *is* a man to call it?" he

A GINGHAM ROSE

frowned at her. "It is so elusive and so valuable, I am afraid to speak of it for fear it go. But it's the quality that lights up the science of things. It gets to a height now and then that science has not learned to formulate, and I hope it never will. Life is cut and dried enough now. Hold fast to every such nameless moment that comes to you. Perhaps it may never be given you to convey a single such moment; words are a lame vehicle after all, but such things, fleeting jack-o'-lantern fancies maybe, will suffuse your toil with a warm glow of personality. Without that glow, work might as well be left undone.

"I do want you to see what I mean, to understand me. I never wanted anything more. There is so much climbing for that spirit of yours to do, so many mistakes to be made and lived down, so much toil,—for I take you seriously enough, child,—so much to be suffered before the spirit may come into a voice of its own. You were born wise, Anne, whatever that means; but unless you come to the wise who have lived, along a path of clean, honest, real work, they will never speak with you as a familiar. What aristocrats they are! Beautiful, more beautiful

A GINGHAM ROSE

than anything else in the world! The place is worth the toil, God knows. The mind is a stupid machine enough unless there is a spirit for propeller. But extremes are the danger of the day.

"There is so much publicity about life now, and it is a contagious disease if ever there was one. Every one must build his house taller than his neighbor, tall, no matter how silly; then he puts on a fantastic overcoat with a red collar and blue cuffs, and he wears it hot or cold, and there he sits and crows! Hideous! Dollars and a machine will build a tall house. But," he laughed, "there is no danger of your doing that, for you have your humorous eye on yourself, or I am mistaken! And, after all, theories won't do much for us except to keep us awake nights. Let's see," he got thoughtfully to his feet and put on his glasses. "Do you know what Carlyle says about theories?" He went to a shelf and his hands moved over the volumes with rapid familiarity.

"Your fingers have eyes, I am sure," smiled Anne.

He glanced over his shoulder. "No, they have habits. Habits are the eyes of the blind, you

A GINGHAM ROSE

know, and there we are, just where we started!" He came back to the light and bent his head over the book, turning rapidly to what he wanted. "Here it is. 'What theory is so earnest as this, that all theories, were they never so earnest, painfully elaborated, are, and by the condition of them must be, incomplete, questionable, even false? The healthy heart that said, "How healthy am I!" was already fallen into the fatal disease.'"

"I know," said the girl, in a voice suppressed by crowding thoughts; "I haven't read Carlyle much, but I have thought about that a lot. It means, doesn't it, that anything that goes after a definite aim is as good as lassoed to start with; is finite and that much less than an impulse?"

The man of science stood with his thumb in the thick volume and his glasses in his hand, looking down on the girl with new-born enthusiasm burning her cheeks to crimson. "I'm no less than an egotistical old fool, I suppose, fancying I can help you. I suppose you'd sit on a stool and talk about 'lassoing ideas' to Carlyle himself, if you had a chance!" He laid the volume aside and sat back in his chair again.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, Anne, I have such faith in you, and I am about at the end of my faith in myself, you see. I think I shall go on permitting myself the luxury of egotism till you forbid me. Why, you fortunate baby, you have a gift of fifty years of opportunity before you; think of it! But you won't think of that till you some day suspect yourself of being a failure, and that will come after the gift is about used up. But you *must* have some training. I know you will suffer for it unless you do. It will give you possession of yourself, it will put the tools into your hands, and then the impulses will begin to crystallize. Anne, will you do as I wish for a while?"

"I should rather do something for you than any one else," she said fervidly; "but unless I can feel as you do about it, it won't be any use trying. I'm just a human mule, you know."

"Well," he laughed, "that is better than being a human hobby-horse. But, I want you to do some good reading, to write just because you have something to say and not to cover so many yards of paper with so many hundred words. Let the publishers be for a while, for as long as they'll let you be. With a few good old excep-

A GINGHAM ROSE

tions they have degenerated into factories, and books are made, not written. The editor has turned into a caterer and popularity is his idol. And if he gets his hands on you he'll punch you into his newest mold, then presto! just when you are getting comfortable, he has a new mold and you, if you have escaped being eaten, will find yourself helping to make a monument out of a heap of dough. There is a kind of thing in literature to-day that to me is baffling and misleading. That man there," pointing to a modern little book lying on the table, "is one of its symbols."

"Symbol," he repeated thoughtfully, sending a gentle blue cloud of smoke from a delicious cigar about his head to help the thinking; "that is a pretty word and the right one, I fancy. What he writes is sweet, and sometimes very beautiful, but it is the deadly, paralyzing sweetness and beauty of the swamp-lily. I admit there are swamp-lilies: the thing is true; that's the worst of it; I've caught my breath at the sight of them and the scent of them, more than once. But the trouble is they turn everything into a swamp-lily. Truth is not in a rut; it takes ac-

A GINGHAM ROSE

count of an old-fashioned garden as well as the big pungent flowers of the swamp. Truth is a quality; it is as big as it is little; it is as affected as it is honest. Everything is true. To-day, yesterday, and to-morrow; one as true as the other. You are modern to your finger-tips, Anne, but you have the brow of a Puritan, no matter if there is a little devil in the tail of your eye. So much the better. You'll see just so much more truth. You must live enthusiastically, but in health; you must run down a by-path and take a look at the land now and then; you must be non-partizan, listen to all sides with equal heart and brain turned on full, and you will live to hear an old fool say, 'I told you so!'

The girl's eyes shone and she had too full a heart just then to stoop to words, so she rested her cheek a moment against the hand on his knee.

"Ah," he smiled, his eyes frankly misty, "that is the kind of impulse that tells. The best promise of all. There are no words so eloquent as doing. And, Anne, do you realize the feminine beauty of the quality? Your sense of things is so inborn, your touch so much your own, you

A GINGHAM ROSE

can't hurt it by forgetting it and going to work at the language of some of the good old men whose work is done. It was done for you and your kind, child. Every one may buy a book, but very few can read it. Let the impulses be; they are like physical beauty,—they will take best care of themselves. Work honestly and with all your heart, and the style will come to the well-grounded surface like destiny atop of toil.”

“Don't you think—” and there was a timidity in the girl's voice—“that impulse is destiny?”

Marr fairly beamed. “Blessed baby, been reading Maeterlinck, eh? Confound him!” he laughed good-naturedly. “Of course it is,—that is just what it is. By impulse a man is given a glimpse, like temptation, into what he might do if he would, but so few have the patience to do their work. Glimpses and impulses make great leaps; the creature may not go so fast. But the big men are all great craftsmen and they have given their best years and strength to learning their trades. And in the end, because they are big of heart, they forget the toil, take it for granted, as a thing naturally to be expected, and then they come into a very

A GINGHAM ROSE

unconsciousness of having slaved and sacrificed at all. That is the reward above wages, child. Do you understand?" he bent toward her eagerly. His face grew hard and stern. "I will *not* have you be a 'smart' writer. It's stuff and silliness in the end. It simply means a dilettante skill, and keeping open-eyed pace with the fashion of the day, not forgetting, above all things, to be up in time to see the color of the sunrise and to cast an early-worm eye on the shop-windows. Bah, it is sickening. Why, think of the real men! Who cares in his heart of hearts what trend their personal vanity took? We like, over a cup of tea with a pretty woman, to remark upon Whitman's long hair, Byron's limp, and Swinburne's chin, but read your Whitman, your Byron, your Swinburne, and you don't care a fig. Why, the commonest farmer, if by chance he unearthed something uncommon with his plow, unearthed a fad that matched the sunrise, let us say, could no doubt put up an 'eccentricity' that would send the long hair, the limp, and the chin to oblivion; what is more, he'd have to look 'eccentricity' up in the schoolhouse diction-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ary, then chuckle into his corn-cob pipe, because, all the time, he'd been rather inconvenienced by an angel unawares!"

Anne gave a great, droll sigh. "I give up vanity from this hour," she announced solemnly. "I shall bob my precious pigtails and take to blue-jeans!"

"I rather think not," laughed Marr. "All that is a part of your strength while you last. Intropective people always see things through themselves, and the pigtails and the ruffles won't hurt. Who's there?" He suddenly sat up, and they all started at a tap on the door.

The imperturbable maid entered with a note for Marr on her tray. There was a special delivery stamp on the envelope. Then she closed the door and he came back to the lamp. "Humph!" and his mouth compressed and the corners drew down. He tore it open carefully and read it to himself. "Well, I'm damned," he said gently, with a profound glance over his glasses at the two. Then he crumpled the letter and put it in his pocket. "Stetson, your aunt and your cousin are leaving for Vermont to-

A GINGHAM ROSE

morrow morning. I, for one, am glad of it, confound 'em!"

"So am I," said Victor, so conclusively that Anne's misgivings all fled.

"Aren't we to know what she says?" asked the girl, feminine to the last.

"Nothing worth the reading," said Marr, briefly. He went to a cabinet in a corner and brought out a decanter of mellow liquor and poured out three generous glasses. "On your feet," he commanded. He held his glass high and clinked theirs lightly. "Let 'em stay in Vermont!" he said solemnly. "Delicious, is it not?" he smiled, putting down his glass and looking rather ashamed of himself.

"Ruth and the Man-eater get home to-morrow," said Anne, bridging a silence that was somehow embarrassing. "Might we not ask them to come on Wednesday?"

"Just the thing," said Victor. "Little Ruth likes nothing better than weddings. We'll ask them?" He turned to Marr.

"Of course," said the man. "A girl who has been to her own wedding and still likes nothing

A GINGHAM ROSE

so well as weddings, must be an unusual girl. I shall no doubt profit by meeting a fellow man-eater, too. After all," he ruminated, with his eyes on the ceiling, "we must give the devil her due. Your relative seems to have a certain genius, Stetson, for getting herself elected to be every one's aunt! Every one except me," he laughed. "I'm immune!"

That night before Marr went to bed he unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out a little package of letters. They were tied with a common string and there was about them more the systematic neatness of a man of method than the treasure of a man of sentimentality. He smiled as he laid the crumpled letter from his pocket with the rest and retied the string. "The same kind of paper, the same writing, the same temper, by George!" he laughed to himself. "Agatha is a strong woman!"

CHAPTER XX

I can not speak, nor think,
Nor dare to know that which I know.

—SHAKESPEARE.

While Marr with his heart was doing his best to remember again a girl of "yesterday" and with his mind was helping Anne toward the truth as he saw it, while John was hunting honesty in the eccentricities of upper Broadway, another thread of the same tangle was being sorted out by Catherine and her Aunt Agatha Tyler in their hotel. And the busy, wise spider of circumstance snapped his eyes to see, and spun and spun. The gray festoons of cloth-of-web hang over the city from its roofs, its tree-tops and its spires, until it is a miracle that the sun ever finds his way through at all.

The clock over the fireplace had just chimed ten—a hideous little clock of brass and onyx, every one of its elaborated inches telling beneath its boast of thousands on thousands cast in the

A GINGHAM ROSE

very same mold. John had said he would be back by nine o'clock: he was now an hour late—such a slow hour to Catherine. Many things, she told herself, might happen to keep the most earnest man back an hour in a city of such distances. Just the same she was frightened.

As they went down to dinner, Mrs. Tyler had sent a special delivery letter to some one, but with so forbidding an air that she had not ventured a question; she was afraid to know. For the first time in her life the girl was being really slighted, and something akin to resentment was struggling for breath within her. She went over to the long glass between the two windows that faced the avenue and pretended to arrange her hair. It was faultless enough, but she wanted to look at herself, to ask herself if she deserved such treatment, such neglect. She had dressed as John liked her best to-night, because he had been so gentle with her when her aunt had lost her temper in the afternoon. She had been so sure he would make everything right; she was sure now, of course she was. To dress as he liked her best was to please by a feminine highway, a frank highway that many follow in fran-

A GINGHAM ROSE

tic zeal, a highway that comes out nowhere because it makes a circle. And it is lined all the way around with terrifying mirrors.

The art of being complex was to the girl a blind alley; she did not dream of contrariness as a healthy dash of cool water, as a charm that might produce a saving shock. Her dress was of creamy lace, girlish in design,—John loved a rich dress of white; about her waist was a narrow belt of black satin,—John appreciated a bit of rich black; the belt was drawn snugly with a tiny rose-gold clasp,—that she risked for herself; at her belt was a heavy bunch of rich scarlet geraniums, John's flower; and her beautiful fair hair was brushed till it shone like a well-regulated halo about her face. And the face? She gazed furtively into the mirror and for the moment felt assured. "But why, why does he not come?"

Agatha Tyler had dressed, too, but not in white. Dress was, with her, as feathers and paint with an Indian. When especially annoyed she donned a dress of black net, very expensive, and embroidered all over with bright steel and jet points, the whole made over a ground of un-

A GINGHAM ROSE

compromising black silk. The result was regal, if forbidding, and the thousand and one little points of light seemed to respond to her mood, to snap and snarl and glitter as she did not quite dare do. Catherine knew the garb for a sign and walked with care till it had gone back to the wardrobe.

"No doubt you think yourself rather good-looking," commented Agatha Tyler, tossing aside a magazine with an ill-concealed yawn. "I judge from the papers that there are no more jokes in the world," she added cheerfully.

Catherine's quick blush was telltale, but she was too preoccupied to be resentful. She was used to the acrid old woman and had learned to listen without hearing. If one isn't killed by it too soon one may become accustomed to any sort of noise.

"And you *are* a handsome girl, decidedly handsome," added Agatha Tyler, her eyes snapping with family pride. "I should punish the young man severely for his negligence."

The girl turned and observed her aunt in frank amazement. She scarcely remembered ever having been praised before. Catherine was

A GINGHAM ROSE

negative by nature and loved peace; they never quarreled because she took whatever came along rather than have a scene. But, after all was said and done, they did depend upon each other, and after their own natures had no little love for each other. "Something must have happened," she murmured, and could not have said whether she meant to her aunt or to John.

"I should think so," was the short response. Catherine could think of nothing to say; so for a while the room was still except for the clapping of hoofs on the pavements and the hum of gay human traffic in the street below. But Mrs. Tyler was tired of all her resources, the papers were stupid, and Catherine's affairs were in the balance. She decided that the girl must be made to talk whether she liked or not, and she put the papers finally aside. She raised her lorgnette and sat back in her chair.

"No doubt John decided to take that impossible girl out to dine. She may even decide to marry him instead of your cousin Victor before Wednesday. I shouldn't be surprised if they were married already! If you had listened to me in the first place and had left these dreadful

A GINGHAM ROSE

Bohemian people to their paint and their bad manners you would not be sitting here now in your best clothes and with no one but your aunt to see. See what meddling with people beneath his class has done for poor Victor. I suppose if this thing continues you'll be taking to short skirts and trying to 'do something' yourself next,—though I promise you, you'll not, as long as I am alive to prevent it. I am certain the life they lead is outrageously improper."

"But, Auntie," gasped Catherine, "you do not realize what awful things you are saying!" She sat up straight and a new determination was born to her of her aunt's injustice. "Do you know, Auntie, I think we have never been just to Anne Preston? She is very pretty, and John says she is very talented and smart, and no end of fun, once you know her, and she is interesting even when you just meet her as we did. I do wish," she sighed drearily as her eyes wandered back to the brazen-faced clock, "that I knew how to be interesting!"

"Heaven forbid!" said the woman, fervidly. "Nothing so certainly upsets a family as an 'interesting' child."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, Auntie," smiled Catherine, "she has been very good to Victor. Didn't Doctor Marr say she had been perfectly devoted to him?"

"Don't *speak* of that man to me!" and the steel and jet twinkled as she fidgeted in her chair. "Who *is* this girl? Answer me that!"

"John says—" Catherine began.

"'John says—'" echoed Mrs. Tyler. "John is under her thumb like all the rest."

"Besides, Auntie, it is only fair to wait till we know what has happened. I am nearly sure that it will all turn out to be right."

"When you are as old as I am you will have discovered that where there are a man and another woman in the case nothing is sure except that you will, more than likely, be left in the lurch! Why, John acts as if he thought he had already married you. It is presumptuous. I never saw such lack of consideration in all my life! It is a very inconvenient period of civilization for a young man who has something to explain: there is a telegraph office at every corner. There *can* be no excuse unless he has had the grace to break his neck. Nothing so respectable

A. GINGHAM ROSE

as an honestly broken neck ever happens in these scandalous times!"

Catherine looked so weary and so hopeless that for a moment the old face softened. The desolation that happens to inexperience is as sad as the trouble that comes upon the heels of wilful wrong. Though she stormed and abused the girl, she was, after all, her favorite sister's child and the only member of her family near or far who would live with her. She knew she would be lonely beyond endurance after Catherine had married and had left her home in Vermont. Though she slighted the girl herself she would not endure the breach from any one else.

"I must say, Catherine, I should like to see you show some pride in this matter. Reprimand the young man as he deserves, or I shall be obliged to do so myself." She wished profoundly that the engagement might be broken, and made up her mind if that were once brought about she would see to it that it remained broken.

It was all Catherine could do to keep the tears back. She sat at a be-Watteaued gilt desk and trailed a pen idly over sheet after sheet of the

A GINGHAM ROSE

heavily crested hotel note paper, getting comfort out of marring the smooth, blank pages. The unwritten paper irritated her nearly as much as did the eternally slow ticking of the clock.

Agatha Tyler, getting no response, rose stiffly. It occurred to her that this was no light matter to the girl, unworthy as John might be, and when she spoke her tone was far from unkind. "If you take my advice, child, you will quit that aimless scribbling and write the young man plainly that you will not endure such treatment; in fact, that your aunt will not allow you to. Tell him that for me. Then come home with me to-morrow."

"Oh, no, Auntie, please, not that!" and the girl bowed her head on the little desk and cried like the child she was. The scarlet geraniums fell out of her belt and were in some danger of being crushed under Mrs. Tyler's feet.

Agatha Tyler was a handsome woman, and as she stood directly beneath the electric lights with her splendid white hair coiled about her strong head and the steel and jet flickering and crinkling, one guessed easily how nearly beautiful she must have been as a girl. Her voice

A GINGHAM ROSE

was shaken by a half-resentful sympathy for Catherine. She hated hearing a woman cry as a man hates it.

"Catherine, child," she said, "who is this John Warren that he should make my niece unhappy? Put him aside; no man is worth your unhappiness to me. You look like your mother, my sister Constance, to-night, more than ever before, though you are always like her. I was fond of her, dear, and I am fond of you, and I can not stand it that an ill-mannered painter should make you miserable. I would rather have you the veriest New England spinster than the wife of this man, anyway. I do not like him, though I have tried my best. I really have, Catherine." She held her head high and tapped the carpet with her foot as she remembered how the ill-mannered painter had wheedled the truth out of her by just sitting in a confidential, intimate way on the table by her side.

"He is selfish to the core. I have always believed there were worse fates in this world than not marrying at all, and all the Warrens and the Marrs in the universe are not likely to change my opinion."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But it means everything to me," moaned the girl. "Oh, you don't, you can't understand, or you would not talk so."

"I don't, I can't understand!" echoed the woman in a lower voice. "Perhaps not," and she sighed. "And perhaps, Catherine, I understand better than you do yourself. Only I know the worth of things better. I have had time to see how they wear." She moved over by the girl and rested her hand on her head, a rare tenderness for her. "Now, dear, do as I say. Go into your room and wash the tears out of your eyes: to waste your good looks on an undeserving man is extravagance indeed. Then come back here and take a fresh piece of paper and write the young man to go his own way."

"I can not, I can not," sobbed the girl.

The woman stooped painfully and picked up the geraniums and stood absently fingering them; brilliant they were near the silver hair and the black dress. Then she laid them gently on the desk near the girl's flushed face and turned to leave the room. At her door she paused. "Besides, Catherine, if he is worth anything at all, being thrown over once or twice will simply

A GINGHAM ROSE

stimulate him and, mark me, he'll come back, with his straight-jacket on, too! Men, men!" she sighed ironically. "Between men and her teeth a woman has trouble all the way from the cradle to the grave. And do not imagine that a handsome woman ever escapes for a moment. Man carries her dead and puts her into the ground, and with some of her aching teeth still in her head! Tiresome, child, and scarcely worth all the tears and trouble." The indignant woman went wearily into her room with her shoulders proudly erect under their burden of cynicism and jet and steel.

Just before the daylight, the same daylight that found John turning the studied order of his studio into chaos, a tired, shaken girl, with her fair hair all about her shoulders, whispered, "Auntie," and threw herself down on her knees by the old woman's bed. "Auntie, dear, I have done as I,—as you said I should,—and I want to go back home."

"Why, Catherine, child," said the startled woman. "Come here to me!"

The warm young arms were around her neck at once in the brave dark. "Oh," she sobbed,

A GINGHAM ROSE

"you must help me, you must, Auntie. There is no one else, and I am so unhappy."

"There need be no one else," and the old arms held her fiercely. "There, there," she whispered soothingly; "I wrote Marr that we were going home in the morning. I knew that you would be a good girl and come with me. It will be all right once we are there." And for the first time in perhaps twenty years, there in the brave, brave dark, Agatha Tyler's eyes were wet. "Just hop in here beside me and go to sleep. Cry all you want to: it is the best way." Catherine clung to her like a child, and slowly the sobs ceased and after a while the girl slept from exhaustion. Agatha Tyler raised herself on her arm to watch her curiously and her hand touched something cool. By the pungent scent she knew that Catherine was clinging to her geraniums. "Poor little girl, foolish child!" she sighed and smiled. Then she carefully unclasped the fingers and dropped the flowers behind the bed. "Not a good thing for her to see the first thing in the morning," she said to herself. And the morning light came prying after a while and marked a new line or two in the old face, but withal an unusual gentleness.

CHAPTER XXI

The window itself is dark; but see!—a firefly
is creeping up the paper pane!

—JAPANESE POEM.

THE CONTRACT.

This is to certify that on the fifteenth day of September at eleven o'clock of the forenoon, in the year of our Lord —, at the sanatorium of Alexander Marr, in this city of New York, borough of Manhattan, before me, Franklin Andrews, a commissioner of deeds for the city of New York, personally appeared:—

Victor Stetson, an illustrator, holding residence at his place, Vineland, near the city of Chicago, in the state of Illinois, and Anne Preston, of — West Fiftieth street, city of New York, borough of Manhattan, and in the presence of Ruth Bowen Rathburn, residing at — West Fiftieth street, city of New York, borough of Manhattan, and Alexander Marr, physician and specialist, residing at his sanatorium, in

A GINGHAM ROSE

West Seventieth street, city of New York, borough of Manhattan, personally known to me and who also to me identified the said Victor Stetson and Anne Preston, who declared severally and acknowledged, in my presence and in the presence of each other, and in the presence of said Ruth Bowen Rathburn and Alexander Marr, whose names are subscribed as witnesses hereto, that they severally took each other, as husband and wife, and had entered into that relation unto each other through life.

ANNE PRESTON.

VICTOR STETSON.

Sealed and delivered in the presence of

RUTH BOWEN RATHBURN,

ALEXANDER MARR,

Witnesses.

CHAPTER XXII

Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

—BROWNING.

Arizona: the sick man with his God in exile only knows the desert, and he seldom speaks of the thing he knows. All about him stretch the dragging, depressed sands; all above him stretches the polished blue sky, staring him in the face with his own sick mood. Be he soul-sick or body-sick, it is flung back upon him; despair by night and cynicism by day. It is only once in a way that one goes to the territory without a secret. The law, or the greed of gold, or disease has urged him with the whisper, "The last resort!"

And the desert takes up the whisper, the stale ground flings it back, and the garrulous little church bells toll it, frantic and shrill. Even the man back of the bells huskily carries along the burden, for disease does not discriminate between virtue and vice, between generosity and

A GINGHAM ROSE

selfishness. So the earnest voice back of the bells is clouded, too, and his horror-stricken Mother Church puts the alarming incongruity away from her merciful sight; sends him into the desert at her own expense, where the man who has made a living by telling other men how to die is given his chance to show the other dying how the thing should be done. And the little bells ring up the curtain every seventh day; the seventh that looks so like the other six. "The last resort!" The dirge of the great southwest.

Somehow disease is never so stern of aspect upon women as upon men. Women, like the flowers, wear the frost-blight with a certain delicacy, with a weather-eye to art. One looks on them and is asked to look again, and if the quick tears start at sympathy there is always the woman-smile back of the tears. But upon a big-framed, one-time-strong, young man, with his soul begging behind his dry, averted eyes, one does not look twice, scarce once; and that look too often stamps upon the marrow an image of hunted self-horror.

The long trains, dust-choked and seldom on

A GINGHAM ROSE

time, crawl over the desert from the north and the south, from the east and the west, bringing and taking, to and from the towns of the exiled. It is hope at its blindest that can find as much as a mirage to pin its faith to. Anne and Victor and Miss Thompson went out by the southern way, and a day in New Orleans, and another in San Antonio, broke the strain; but, from San Antonio on, monotony held the stage. They did their best to keep Victor's eyes away from the discouraging outlook, but every inch of the car was pressed down with silence and blanketed to suffocation with heat. The glaring sun refused to let one speck of dust swim unnoticed.

But between Maricopa and Phoenix the thirsty soul and body have a drink. An oasis it is, rank with green growing things, the flats graciously spread with a rich carpet of alfalfa. In the great need of the moment the sea of sand just beyond is forgotten, and the wanderer arrives in a state of pathetic enthusiasm. The noise and bustle of the arrival of the trains stir the station to life and serve to feed the illusion,—till the train has gone again. Then the tick-tick of the

A GINGHAM ROSE

telegraph is like listening to the beating of one's own frightened heart in the night.

The three, with bags and bundles and rugs, stood half-bewildered on the platform.

"Cab, sir?" and at Anne's side appeared a young man, green-eyed, red-headed, and with freckles that looked like rusty nail-heads. He stood clasping his arms with his big hands as if they might otherwise fall off.

"My name is Daniel Dixon, and I drive my own cab." He waved an arm toward the edge of the platform where the cab was waiting, then instantly clasped his arms again.

"Why, yes," said Anne, looking into the clear, good-natured, round-eyed face. "Will you help me with all these traps?"

"You bet," said Danny, briskly swinging the things up to the driver's seat. He at once recognized her as mistress of the situation. "Darned hot, ain't it? Stan' still, can't you, you darned Indians!" he shouted at his fly-besieged ponies.

Anne glanced at them doubtfully. "Are they quite—gentle?" she asked.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Reg'lar lambs," grinned Danny.

Anne laughed. "It is only that it is necessary to be careful, you know," she said. Danny became serious at once and helped Victor in with real gentleness. Miss Thompson put a pillow under his head with the matter-of-fact manner of professional right that the stubbornest man seldom contradicts, and Anne took the seat by his side. "Pretty tired?" she asked low.

"Yes, but I like to hear him talk," he smiled. "I'll laugh with you when I get my breath."

Daniel Dixon climbed into his high seat with a great, droll sigh over the effort. He blinked into space a moment, then as if Anne's speech had just reached over some roundabout wireless way, he said: "You're right. You can't be too careful jest at first." The ponies started briskly, but Danny knew his team. "Reg'lar devils, them two, fer bluffin'," he remarked, and bent his back and cocked his hat indifferently, just to show her that they were all right. He glanced down over his rusty, alpaca coat-sleeve at the girl. "You look sandy 'nough. Now I bet you ain't afraid of a horse."

Anne had been glancing rapidly about and

A GINGHAM ROSE

had caught the dusty, depressing appearance of the place, and she dreaded, as every one does, the first giving in to the silence. She kept Danny talking. "I'm not much afraid," she admitted with a smile that settled Danny.

"I'll take you a ride some day when it ain't so dad-blasted hot," he said, mopping his face with a handkerchief of ornate border. "Reckon I know every inch of the whole blamed sand-pile, an' the mountains, too," and his green eyes looked ahead proudly. But in another moment the back had wilted to its customary pose of chronic fatigue and he yawned and flecked his whip lazily at the passing pepper trees. "Which hotel?" he asked with a chuckle as he drew in the ponies. "S'pose we'd jest rode on to 'Frisco 'f I hadn't 'a' come to!"

Every one laughed and looked a little foolish. "The Sunny Days," said Anne. "I'm sorry I was so stupid. Have we gone much out of the way?"

"That's nothin'," said Danny, cheerfully. Skilfully he turned the ponies in the narrow street. "Ain't any of 'em more 'n a stone-throw apart, an' I don't mind goin' the long way round.

A GINGHAM ROSE

It's more excitin' than sittin' till next train-time a-talkin' to myself or goin' to the stable and gettin' the devil from pap." He paused a while to rest, then asked, "Goin' to stay long?"

"Oh, yes," answered Anne, drowning the dreariness out of her voice. "We'll live here, more than likely."

"Gosh a'mighty!" exclaimed Danny, seriously. "The whole bunch of you a-going to put up at Mis' Gritz's? I'd hate to haf to pay the fare!"

"Maybe we'll buy a farm after we have looked about a bit," suggested Victor.

Danny Dixon was, in his own way, a shy young man, and he never made advances. But now he turned about and looked at Victor with a beaming smile. "Now, will you jest listen to that!" he said to Anne. "Feelin' better already, ain't you?" Then he chuckled to himself and added: "But I reckon you won't find many farms lyin' loose around here."

"How about ranches?" asked Anne, with a superior glance at Victor.

Danny slapped his knee. "Now you're a-shoutin'." Then he turned to Victor again.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Reckon there ain't 'nother climate like this 'n on earth. Pap says there ain't, an' he's been round a lot, pap has. Yep; he's been 's far east 's Kansas City once, an' he used to drive the stage 'tween here an' Los Angeles 'fore the railroad come by here so as to give me a job."

"Interesting," said Anne, resolving to meet Danny's pap.

"You bet yer life," agreed Danny. All at once he sat up straight with an approach to real interest in every one of his shambling lines. "Whew!" he whistled. "Now, if that ain't a peach bunch 'f clouds! They's cumulous clouds, by Jinks!" He got to his feet and stood balancing himself perfectly with the lines high in one hand and the whip in the other till Anne thought in her soul they'd land in an irrigating canal. Danny collapsed as suddenly as he had risen. "You'll jest haf to excuse me," he said sheepishly. "Good thing pap wasn't around to catch me a-doin' stunts with passengers aboard. He'd a-whaled me fer that, he would. But 't ain't often you see 's fine an example of cumulous clouds as them this time of year."

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne and Victor exchanged a puzzled glance. "You seem to know a good deal about cloud forms," she suggested.

"Well," and Danny scratched his head with his big freckled hand, "it's all I *do* know 'bout, and it seems 's if a fellow's got to know 'bout somethin' out here or he's liable to jest ferget to wake up some sunshiny mornin'. Nothin' much happens, you know, an' bein' nat'rally excitable—pap says I'm the darndest ever born fer excitement—I get sort of upset when a good-sized cloud comes a-whizzin' by," and he added a note of realism by whizzing his long whip and the ponies did their best to continue the dramatic effect. "Here's yer shanty standin' here a-waitin' fer you an' lookin' 'bout 's it did last time I come by!" said Danny; and with a "Whoa!" and many flourishes of the whip, he drew up in a cloud of dust before the "Sunny Days."

CHAPTER XXIII

A rustic world; sunshiny, lewd, and cruel.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

It required but a glance to interpret the atmosphere of the "Sunny Days." A square red-brick house it was, with green blinds and white trimmings, all reduced to a tone by the dust that rested undisturbed on the stupid face of things. A clay sidewalk ran from the street to the steps of the "stoop", and rickety were both steps and "stoop". On each side of the walk was laid out a square patch of trampled sand, and in the center of each patch a pepper tree found it possible to thrive, paying for the possibility by a reasonable return of shade. On the stoop-rails and the steps was a burden of sun-soaked invalids, perched there like a family of turtles on a log at midday. In the doorway, with one fat hand on the latch of the screen and the other reposing on the band of her muslin apron, stood Angelina Gritz, propri-

A GINGHAM ROSE

etor, manager, and cook-at-large of the establishment.

Victor was completely tired out, and Anne, after paying Danny the fares, took his arm and walked slowly by his side to the house, Danny and Miss Thompson following with the luggage. The entrance of the new-comer is often as tragic as his exit. He seldom takes much part in the exit, and there is at least one less to suffer. The indolent ones on the steps moved aside with unusual interest. It was uncommon to see a young man sent into exile so well guarded and cared for.

"The hotel's 'bout full-up," mentioned Mrs. Gritz, chewing gum with an achievement of self-unconsciousness and frankly counting and appraising the baggage.

Anne's heart went down, but suddenly Danny appeared by her side and though he looked half asleep he seemed to know the right thing to say. "I'll jest stay round, Mis' Gritz, an' if you ain't got room fer 'em I'll drive 'em right over to Mis' Farrar's."

"You, Danny Dixon, you go along 'bout yer biznis," and there was lightning in Angelina

A GINGHAM ROSE

Gritz's bright blue glance. "I'll jest speak to yer pap 'bout the way you hang round a-puttin' yer freckled finger into other people's pie!" Then she held the screen wide. "Step right into the parlor, please," she said with gutturals for elegance. "And you, Danny, you set them valises an' things down on the stoop, and don't you bring yer dusty boots into my house!" Waving her apron at the flies, she slammed the door for accent, then came waddling into the parlor.

"I s'pose like as not that boy's been a-stuffin' you all the way up from the deepo. He's jest an awful worry to his pap: such a nice man, too! There ain't no accountin' fer children these days," she sighed, wagging her plump little jaw over her chewing-gum. "Ever since them geo-ology-men come out here from Washington, D. C., and wouldn't have nobody but that Danny to show 'em round, there ain't been no livin' in the same town with him. I reckon there ain't no real harm in him 'cept he's fer ever round under a person's feet." She took a rocking-chair and drew it directly in front of Anne and Victor, who seemed anything

A GINGHAM ROSE

but at home with the ingrain carpet upholstery. " 'Bout how much room do you want?" she asked, looking them in the eye with the shrewd curiosity that says it won't be swindled,—a look that women proprietors always wear. No doubt they think they must.

"We want three rooms and a bath," said Victor.

"Bath!" and Angelina doubled up with mirth. "The idea! There ain't no water to spare fer new-fangled notions out here, I tell you!" She hitched her chair a foot nearer and with a lapse into the very depths of the confidential she asked, "Married?" Every one jumped and Angelina tweaked her small nose and laughed again.

"My name is Stetson," said Victor, a little stiffly, for he was getting too tired to see things in a funny light, "and this is my wife, and Miss Thompson is a trained nurse and will stay with us as long as it seems necessary,—certainly till we can be sure if the climate is best for me."

"Climate's all right," said Angelina, making frantic effort to repress her amusement and shaking silently till Anne thought her clothes

A GINGHAM ROSE

must burst. "Guess you ain't said 'my wife' more'n a thousand times before. You can't fool me!" She shook her plump finger. "I ain't been in the hotel biznis fifteen years fer nothin', not much! Five years while John Gritz was a-livin'. He died of chronic dyspepsia, John did: like as not it jest come from my 'lowin' him round the kitchen and his jest a-nibblin' this an' that whenever he took a notion. An' I have had the house ten years now on my own hook, an' done mighty well, too, with all these sharks for competition out here." She flushed dangerously and Anne wondered if "Mis' Far-rar" was the particular shark. "You want to take care of yerself, young lady," she said suddenly to Anne. "I don't know if I've got suitable rooms. How long you a-goin' to stay?"

"Till Mr. Stetson is entirely well again," said Anne, firmly.

"Now that's somethin' like," said Angelina, getting vigorously to her feet. "Mr. Stetson, an' you, Miss Thompson, you jest set here in the parlor and make yerselves to home while I show Mis' Stetson the rooms. 'Twon't take no time, an' then I'll make you a cup of good strong

A GINGHAM ROSE

tea, fer it does beat all the way drinkin' somethin' hot does cool off a person's inside these scorchin' days, though it does seem a good deal like a-slappin' a flat-iron with a wet towel!" When she and Anne had gone out of hearing down the hall she stopped and asked in a stage whisper, "Only one of you is a 'lunger'?"

"A what?" and Anne drew back aghast.

"Lunger," Angelina repeated, coughing by way of illustration. "Lan' sakes, you'll get used to that. It's what they calls 'emselves. You see, Mis' Stetson, it's like this with me. I don't like takin' fatal cases, 'cause it gives my reg'lars the blues. An' I've got some real nice young men a-livin' in the house. That Miss Corwin out there on the stoop is the only girl an' she ain't much account, goodness knows, but girls is girls, an' the sickest young man likes 'em around, sort of cheers 'em up, you know. I haven't time to do much but feed 'em myself. I'd like havin' you if he ain't very bad, because you'd cheer 'em up, I know. Bein' well an' good-lookin' an' all. Mr. Stetson looks pretty tuckered out, but maybe it's the ridin' on the cars."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"That is all, Mrs. Gritz. He is worn out with the journey. The doctor gives us every encouragement." Anne sighed as she looked into the depths of the burden she had lifted.

"Come far?" asked Angelina, fitting a key into the door.

"New York," said Anne, absently.

"For the lan' sake!" gasped Angelina with a stare. "The poor man! Why, comin' all that way 'd tire out a drummer, to say nothin' of a lunger!"

There were two adjoining rooms, a small rusty stove in the corner of one, and windows to the south and east. "We must have a fire whenever Mr. Stetson wants one, even if it seems warm enough to you and me, Mrs. Gritz," said Anne.

"Now," beamed Angelina, "that's jest the way I like havin' folks speak up. It pays in the long run. John Gritz was all his life in a peck of trouble with one person or another 'cause he was so chicken-hearted 'bout speakin' up in the first place. We'll have a fire right now, if you say so," she laughed, mopping her low brow that was wrinkled like an inquisitive pup's.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, there now, you mustn't pay no 'tention to me. I've always got to have my joke. I don't see no use makin' a long face 'bout things, specially," she laughed, "when the Lord give you a round one to set you goin' with. I always get 'long with my boarders jest splendid."

Anne smiled and thanked her. She was getting glimpses of the heart underneath the crudities. Angelina was a healthy, happy sort of plant rooted by chance in a soil that made cheerfulness seem a little tragic. But the girl paused frightened before some of the things Angelina found it possible to joke about.

Then they brought Victor up and had him lie down while they put the rooms in order. "The car-builders don't arrange for six-footers," he smiled. "Isn't it a joy to be still and warm?" He turned his head and closed his eyes.

Angelina, who had nearly carried him upstairs in spite of his protests, stood with her hands clasped over her undulating waist-line. "Now maybe you'd jest ruther sleep till supper time than be bothered with tea?"

Victor looked up at her and smiled. "Yes, thanks, I'll sleep, I think. How good you are!"

A GINGHAM ROSE

That settled Angelina and she waddled downstairs and informed the loungers on the stoop that the "new 'rivals is the real thing!"

Miss Thompson had a room down the hall and while she was getting her own things in order and opening Anne's bags for her in the back room, Anne sat with Victor. She had hardly gone into Anne's room when hysterical laughing from Victor brought her quickly to the door. That he wanted to laugh was a good sign, but as weak as he was it was a danger, too. In spite of herself she joined in.

Anne was rocking madly around the room with one hand clasped over an imaginary apron band and working her jaw dangerously. "I can do it, I can!" she said triumphantly. "It's as hard as rubbing your stomach and patting your head. Married?" she finished explosively, coming to a stop by Victor's bed.

"Now, Mrs. Stetson," said Miss Thompson, trying her best not to smile, "I shall not leave you with my patient if you are going to behave so."

"Oh, let her be," said Victor. "She beats sleeping."

A GINGHAM ROSE

When Miss Thompson came in Anne slipped downstairs to take a look at things. She produced an immediate silence upon the group on the stoop, a silence that spells guilt and lazy tact. "Don't move, please," she said to the men on the steps. "There is room to get by. I just came down to look about."

"Going to stay?" asked the pale Miss Corwin, eagerly.

"Why, yes," said Anne. "I think so. Every one seems very kind. It is just a question of whether the climate is best for Mr. Stetson." As she walked on down the steps each of the indolent ones turned the name "Stetson" over in his mind, wondering if he had known any Stetson back east.

At the street Anne stopped and as she looked down-town she laughed, for over in the spotted shade of a cottonwood tree, the pink sunshine freckling things even as Danny was freckled, was the cab, and Danny taking a nap on the back seat. He had gone a safe distance from Angelina's wrath, and, for completer repose, had hitched his ponies to the tree. She crossed over

A GINGHAM ROSE

and stood looking at him till he wakened with a mighty start.

"I jest thought I'd wait round," he explained sheepishly. He climbed out and Anne sat down on the floor of the cab and tucked her feet out of the dust on the steps.

"I am glad you did, because you can tell me about things," she said.

Danny blushed furiously. "Well"—he turned his hat about in his hands—"there ain't much to tell. You get so you don't care 'bout nothin' jest so you are 'lowed to set still. Even talkin' goes back on you after a while. Yer ears ache till they feel like bustin', it's so still, sometimes. You see," he explained, "there ain't a darned thing to make a noise." He glanced at her sideways a moment, then asked awkwardly: "He ain't very bad off, is he?"

"Oh, no," said Anne. "He is very tired. I made him laugh a little while ago and got sent out of the room by the nurse." The boyish something about her came to the surface and put Danny at his ease.

"Come far?" he asked.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"New York," sighed Anne.

"Gosh!" said Danny, and something seemed to stiffen his spine. Then he slapped his knee and laughed till he grew red as a poppy. "My boastin' 'bout pap's havin' been to Kansas City must have tickled you some." Then he grew serious. "I'm goin' about myself some day, if I don't get sun-baked fer good before business picks up. It's mighty easy doin' nothin', ain't it? Nice outfit?" and he waved his hand with proprietorship including the ponies and the cab. "Pap set me up. Pap don't think much of me as a business man, he don't." Danny contemplated Anne a moment, then a smile spread to a grin all over his face and at last broke into a gurgling laugh. "You remember my sayin' I'd take you round to Mis' Farrar's if there wasn't room here, and what a rise I got out of Angelina?"

"Yes," laughed Anne. "I couldn't make it out."

"Well," and Danny fairly hugged himself with glee, "Mis' Farrar, she's a-courtin' pap, and pap, he's a-courtin' Mis' Gritz!"

"Mercy on us!" laughed Anne.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Ain't it great?" gasped Danny, undutifully. "Pap 'd skin me alive fer a-tellin', he would. Men is so darned high an' mighty when they's in love," and again Danny bent double with mirth.

"You know too much," said Anne, with a solemn gaze.

"Me?" and the green eyes were wide with droll incredulity. "Pap says that 'cept fer my red hair he'd think me a born fool. He says I'm doin' my best to break the red-headed rule. An' I reckon anybody 'bout town 'd tell you, without chargin' you a cent fer the information, that I ain't got sense enough to get in out of the wet,—it bein' such a rainy climate, you know!" he finished dryly. "Don't have rain often enough to remember what it feels like. Pap says that's why I take such an all-fired interest in clouds. Ain't 'nough of 'em to worry me any."

Anne rose and smiled up at Danny till he knew himself a slave. "I hope," she said low, in a tone of conspiracy, "that your pap gets Mrs. Gritz, because then you'll come to the 'Sunny Days' to live."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"By golly, that's right," said Danny, profoundly. Then, as Anne started away, he sham-bled up into his driver's seat and picked up the reins.

"Better unhitch," suggested Anne, and, laughing, left him red and sheepish but always able to join in a laugh on himself.

Anne smiled at Miss Corwin as she went in and shut the screen quietly behind her.

A long-legged lunger with his legs twisted about the palings of the stoop chuckled dryly. "She won't be so flighty after she has been here a month or so. They are always like that when they first come, especially the women." He threw a sprig from the pepper tree into the lap of Miss Corwin. Certainly there was no trace of the flighty left in her.

"Poor girl!" sighed a big hulky fellow with stooped shoulders, who was sitting on the lowest step whittling a stick. The action and the piercing light showed the thinness of his hands terribly. "Man looked pretty sick. I hate seeing them come. He's lucky, though, having her. I wonder if she really cares!" He yawned and stretched himself, but the long arms suddenly

A GINGHAM ROSE

collapsed in an ugly cough. "Damn!" he whispered huskily and went on with the whittling.

"She'll know how to take care of herself, I guess," yawned a sun-burned fellow in a chair tilted against the wall. He was reading a paper two weeks old and drumming a tune with his fingers on the leg of his chair. "You are a cheerful lot, I must say."

"I have noticed that most people about here know how to take care of themselves," said Miss Corwin, shrewdly. The man had sound lungs and would tell no one why he had come out. The lungers exchanged amused glances.

"You are cross to-day," laughed the tall fellow on the rail, with a good-natured look into the pale girl's eyes.

"I guess you were never cross in your life, Jerusalem James," she smiled up at him with frank partiality.

Some humorous one, whom the climate had turned into a cynic, had dubbed the tall fellow "Jerusalem James"—first, because his mother had in the beginning called him James, and second, because, when the lungs got bad and he was ordered out southwest, she had obtained his

A GINGHAM ROSE

promise always to go to church at least once on Sunday; and go he did, though the others laughed and the sermons from the sick man "back of the bells" nearly broke his heart. He was gentle as a girl and he helped all the rest over the hard places with his stingless impertinences and his awkward drollery. The pale Miss Corwin adored him. Miss Corwin's sentence had been pronounced: "Freedom into death in six months, if you take great care." Jerusalem James, who was not much better off, understood and was kind.

"Is it anywhere near dinner-time?" yawned Miss Corwin, turning her eyes lazily from face to face. No one took the trouble to answer a thing that time would obviously tell. Jerusalem James did look at his watch, but he forgot what he saw before he remembered to tell it. Besides, no one really cared.

CHAPTER XXIV

Well, life is stronger than character.

—GORKY.

It was late in the afternoon of Christmas day and Anne and Victor had been for a long ride on their ponies. Danny cared for the ponies and Victor had taken them to the stable. She sat on the rail of the stoop fanning herself with her sombrero and waiting for him. She was so tired, somehow; she closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the post. Victor stood the heat, even seemed to thrive on it, but it wrung the very life out of her.

Christmas is a difficult day for the exile. When he closes his eyes he sees snow and a big open fireplace, and over his ears, aching with the silence, slip echoes that break his heart, echoes of sleigh-bells, of hilarity, of healthy enthusiasm and friendliness in voices.

In the dense summer-like heat the very sense of the holiday seems to evaporate, the prevailing

A GINGHAM ROSE

indolence stares hilarity in the face, fun turns frantic and finally drops dead like a top that has spun its course; the invalid is set to wondering if he may live to see another Christmas: and all of this in the very heart of a desert that boasts of bearing on its dry breast everything that grows in that other desert that gave the world its Christ. Especially is the thorn-bush "pointed plain."

Anne was wretched and homesick, and of late the old dizzy attacks she had suffered from the summer before had come upon her again. She had thought then they were from overwork: now she did not know what to think. One gives up trying to think after a while in a land where the nights and days are long and alike, except in color.

During the last slow weeks she had come to realize that, spiritually at least, she had sold herself into bondage. No one could say she had not served her master well: Victor was amazingly better and very happy, and the nurse had long since gone back east. But how about herself? Perhaps she did not matter: just the same the pain of starving hurt terribly and persist-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ently. Imaginative, strong, electric, sensitive, industrious, impulsive, natural—she was all of these things; and such women do not die serenely. The incongruous people about her, under the same roof, the roof that was called the “Sunny Days,” clung to one another, not because of a mind in common, but because of a childish fear of the immense emptiness around and about them,—children doomed to death and afraid to die, saying so with every covert glance of their feverish eyes,—cowards of a kind so pitiful that they wrung her heart even as they discouraged her. She had come out stimulated by a belief that when she had become accustomed to her new surroundings she would be able to get to work with new purpose; and, what a wonderful thought, she would be free from the predilections of the editor-general! But she found her own enthusiasm a store of food that dwindled rapidly and was not replenished. Victor never spoke of her work now, seemed not to care whether she ever did anything or not. Health was his aim and he seemed to think of no other. She was pretty and bright and that was enough.

The sun and glare had wilted her body but

A GINGHAM ROSE

her mind would not rest; that was the worst of all—it throbbed and taunted her like a conscience. “Homesick? Homesick for what?” she asked herself bitterly, and the answer came in a glare of truth, a glare so much more luminous than even the tropical sun: “You are homesick for your birthright of freedom, for the breath and the voice of the great, toiling, quick city, for work; yes, even for the loneliness and the hard side of strife; you have been false to the best there is in you.”

She knew all this, but what to do? The very thought set her brain and blood quivering. And always she must keep the dead weight to herself: it would break Victor’s heart if he dreamed of it. She had come out there to save his life, not to break his heart. She knew, too, that she was made of tough fiber and that she had much to endure; she knew that she had hardly started on her way; but what a long, white, stupid, dust-choked road it was! It wound through her heart and crushed her. She saw herself in the end giving in to the depression and the depravity, becoming a kind of beast of burden; or, worst horror of all, coming to accept the way.

A GINGHAM ROSE

of a woman-butterfly that lights on the shoulder of a man, to be carried and pampered by a thing the butterflies call "love", so that the small feet may avoid the dust. She hated her own selfishness and her stubborn spirit; she told herself she was acting like a wilful child that has chosen its food, then for a whim will not eat it. She tried to love Victor, tried sincerely, pitifully, but love is something like genius and does not come at the call of convenience. One thing alone was clear to her mind, one conviction in all the jumble: Victor must never know, not if it killed her; and she told herself with scorn that it would never kill her, that she was not fine enough for that.

And night and day John Warren was lurking about her mind. If she could only know what the world was doing for him. Ruth knew nothing about him and Marr never spoke of him. She had watched his work in the magazines, keen to see but afraid to look. And a change there was, but a change that baffled her. There was a complete discarding of the "fog of lines" and the mannerisms—the mannerisms that she had scolded and scoffed at, but now missed with a

A GINGHAM ROSE

sinking of the heart akin to the pain of that night under the dark tree when John, the boy, had seemed to die before her very face. As the months went by a new strength and directness were taking the place of the dead mannerisms; John himself was lost to sight in the sincerity nearly brutal with which he portrayed the thing he had to do. Had Catherine helped him to this? Catherine? She told herself with a tightening of her heart that Catherine never could have led John to any truth about art.

And again, what did it all mean for *her*? Failure, failure; a dreary existence, a stupid waste; always rehearsing, all her life, on a hope, but never really living; always getting ready for to-morrow at the expense of to-day. It was wrong, wrong, wrong; and she was tied by a cord woven of duty and pity to face the wrong patiently though it strangled her

If Victor would only be impatient, if he would only get angry with her! He was always sweet and gentle; life was level, equal to itself and everything else. She wondered if in spite of her vows to silence she would not some

A GINGHAM ROSE

day break them and shriek out. There were some new, delicate lines in her face, the lines of the dreamer whose life hurts, and they contradicted her youth oddly. In her riding-clothes, as she was dressed to-day, she looked as the girl looked in the old Art School days. The short, dust-colored skirt, the thin white shirt-waist, her hair braided and tied low on her neck with a stout black ribbon; the tan leather gauntlets and boots, the Indian whip with its bright woven handle, all gave a touch of masquerade that was picturesque. She was tanned as tan could be; a clear tan it was that let the color glow through, turned the shadows in her hair to blue, and made her blue eyes look like bits of clear remote sky. One suffers long at twenty-two before the suffering tells its story in aught but sympathetic ink or whispers.

Victor came swinging across the street and up the steps two at a time, a very different young man from the Victor of a few months ago.

"You know, Vic, you should not hurry like that." She opened her eyes lazily and smiled.

The place was deserted. It was getting on to dinner-time and Mrs. Gritz had broadly in-

A GINGHAM ROSE

timated that she did wish folks would "dress up" for Christmas dinner.

"I know, Nancy," he laughed, "but I feel so well it is hard to remember." The evening light fell about the girl in a glow like praise, a praise that sang in tune with the love in his heart. It stirred an irresistible impulse, an impulse too warm and quick to be reasoned, and, standing close to her, he put his hand under her chin and turned back her face and

"Searched it, as men do a flower."

"Do you know, kid," he laughed,—“that is what John used to call you, didn't he?—do you know that you look scarcely a day older than when I first met you? The short skirt, and the tan the old sun has painted on your face, I suppose. But there is a something, after all, if one just knows you well enough to see—a kind of grown-upness, I suppose—I—Nancy! I beg your pardon, dear, I forgot myself!” He drew away from her as if she had struck him. There had been a flood of offended color over her face and a look in her eyes. He did not look at her again and his voice was low and hurt. “It is the first

A GINGHAM ROSE

time I have offended, Nancy. You must be patient with me."

"I didn't mind, Vic, dear," she said, and her voice was so small in the big enveloping silence that it overwhelmed her with terror, drowned her, and drew her down, and the dizziness she had been fighting descended and blinded her. "Victor," she gasped, her hands fluttering in the air before her, "I am faint!"

She was white, deadly white through the tan. "Anne," he cried, springing toward her, "you are ill!" He caught her hands and held them close. They were hot and feverish, and dry and trembling like the cottonwood leaves in the still air.

"I don't know," she said faintly, "I used to feel like this last summer and I thought it was overwork, but," she smiled, "it can't be that, so I suppose it is the heat. I felt it once up in John's studio; it was the smoke rushing by the window that brought it on then. It is terrible, Vic, and it frightens me. Things go black, and whirl and dissolve. Ugh!" she shuddered, "it wouldn't be so bad if I could stop thinking, but I seem to be back of myself looking on and

A GINGHAM ROSE

powerless to help. I *must* think, please. Let's go upstairs. I'll rest for a while."

"I can't forgive myself," said Victor, contritely, as they moved slowly up the stairs.

"But," she insisted, "it wasn't you at all. It has happened twice before lately."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

She shook her head and moved on faster. "I'll be all right when I have rested a while. You must not worry, not tell any one. I'll stay out of the heat for a day or two. You see I must not turn invalid and lose my identity. I'll just close my door, Vic, and sleep for half an hour. No one need be any the wiser."

When her door was closed behind her she collapsed and every line was limp and weak. She flung herself down on her bed and shut her eyes; it was no use. Her brain felt dry and burned, and her head would not fit the pillow. The moment her eyes were closed the eternal questioning and thinking began. During the last weeks as the restlessness had increased, she had taken refuge in her imagination.

The nights at least had been all her own; the long, blue, misty nights! Sitting by her open

A GINGHAM ROSE

window or lying with the dark like a cool bandage on her hot eyes, she built an island of her own; a flimsy thing it was, built of hope and notions and moonlight, but free as air; and her hungry spirit imaged a feast and contrived to live a while on the tonic of fancies. But as her body relaxed with the enervating fever of the heat and the contagious laziness possessed her blood, the fancies grew feverish, and where at first she had wilfully kept awake and courted her dreams, now the dreams turned on her, and made her a slave, and would not let her sleep.

She got up and dragged herself wearily to the window and sat looking out on the feathery pepper trees and the shivering silver-lined cottonwoods. A green Christmas truly!

After a while the dizziness all passed and left her weak, but with a sense that it had been a dream, too. She dressed slowly, moving with caution, like one walking on the edge of a pit. She put on a dress of soft, creamy wool, with lines of brown hand-made lace running from the throat to the hem, and a belt and collar of soft, satiny, bluish stuff that repeated the blue of her eyes. Her eyes were strangely clear—the bright,

A GINGHAM ROSE

washed clearness that follows one storm to make way for another. Lastly she clasped about her throat a string of tiny pearls that Marr had sent her for Christmas, pearls with an exquisite little diamond clasp. Usually, if one was given to thinking of such things at all, she reminded one of the women of Manet, Whistler, or Alfred Stevens in her type and her clothes; but to-night in her odd array of tones of white that harmonized marvelously, almost, it seemed, against their will, her black hair so beautifully done, severe in all its great smooth waves brushed till they seemed to be polished, and the tan skin with the contradictory color showing through, she was a Sargent; distinguished, frankly artful, poised, self-respecting, but first and last distinguished. As much herself she was as Sargent would have permitted her to be while making her away in a portrait. It but needed the signature.

About the middle of dinner, Angelina, in a resplendent costume of red Scotch plaid, the kind of wiry stuff that is warranted to scratch at all the seams, appeared beaming in the dining-room doorway. She made a bow which was

A GINGHAM ROSE

not parliamentary, but which was, nevertheless, hearty and good to see.

"If you're all a-settin' in the parlor 'bout nine o'clock I reckon some ice-cream and cake 'll come along a-beggin' to be eat up."

"Hear, hear!" shouted every one, and Angelina disappeared as red as her plaid and as confused.

From dinner-time to nine o'clock is a long chasm to the absent-minded exile on Christmas night, and with frantic energy they all took to whist or fantan.

"If you didn't trump my ace!" groaned Jerusalem James, after a particularly long silence broken only by the clap-clap of the cards. He was playing whist with Anne.

She glanced up half-bewildered and it occurred to him that she was pale and looking ill. "I'm so sorry," she smiled. "I am afraid I was thinking."

"Is that the best you can do when you think?" he persisted with gentle impudence. He thought that perhaps she was finding Christmas as hard as the rest of them. And no wonder; they were not a cheerful lot. He glanced over the room

A GINGHAM ROSE

with its stooped, narrow-chested, sallow, belined crew of humanity.

At that moment Angelina appeared with her heavy tray, a very vision of plenty and generosity.

"I say, Mrs. Gritz," said Jerusalem James, wickedly, "I was star-gazing out of the window a moment ago and I thought I saw Danny Dixon and his pap going up the street."

Angelina put out her lower lip and blushed as red as her dress, then set the tray down on the table, cards and all.

"Well, Jimmy J., if you jest set and watch long 'nough I reckon you'll see 'em a-goin' back down again." She gave him a wide-eyed stare that made him wriggle and shrink, then as she marched out of the room, she gave Anne a distinct wink.

Anne followed her into the hall. "Mrs. Gritz, will you wish Danny and his pap a merry Christmas for me? You have all been so good to us I don't know how we'll ever thank you."

Angelina tweaked her inquisitive little nose and blinked hard. It was an easy matter to talk back to the world in general. They were

A GINGHAM ROSE

to her mind just "kickers", more or less. But a grateful boarder abashed her.

"You jest bet I will," she blurted out. "I was a-sayin' to-night that I wished folks like you-'uns 'd come oftener. It's generally the mean ones as gets sick an' then they's jest that much meaner." Then Angelina Gritz began to laugh. Laughing with her was a matter of start, a wonderful crescendo, an end, then the echo. When her plump body was packed into its best dress the performance was a thing to be considered with wonder and humility.

"Them two men is a-settin' out on the back stoop this minute jest a-doin' their best to freeze their insides. I give 'em each a big spoon an' set the freezer between 'em an' bid 'em each a fond good-by. They's a-browsin' like a pair of city-bred cows that is turned into an alfalfa patch for the first time, an' you can't, to save you, tell if Danny's older than his pap er not. I reckon I'll have to put the old man in the oven over night to thaw him out onct he eats his way through the freezer." The plaid expanses rose and fell with wave on wave of mirth, but suddenly the chuckling congealed and an expression

A GINGHAM ROSE

of comical horror spread over her round face, and, clapping a hand over her mouth, she giggled like a school-girl.

"Oh, Mis' Stetson, if I don't beat all at makin' breaks! I'd a-said that before Jimmy J., jest as like as not, if it had a-come into my head!" She wiped her eyes on her apron. "He'd a-had it all over town by mornin' that I couldn't thaw him out no other way and had chucked him in the oven!" Her round shoulders shook again as a child sobs after the tears have stopped. "Ain't I jest perfectly awful!" she shrieked in a high soprano, and giggling and shaking she waddled down the hall to Danny and his pap.

Anne went back into the parlor. "Jimmy J.," she smiled, "I am told that you are a gossip."

"Me?" said James, innocently. He was sitting in a corner by the pale Miss Corwin and was adroitly engaged in stealing a piece of cake from her coquetting plate. Miss Corwin's eyes were larger and more pitifully frank every day, but James was strong beneath the fire of her galvanic glances, and so gentle. Suddenly he got to his feet and started toward Anne. Victor was there before him and caught her as she fell. She was in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXV

In the midday blaze of truth above,
The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
You needs must pry about and trace the birth
Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,
To the night's sun that's Lucifer himself,
Do so, at other time, in other place,
Not now, not here!

—BROWNING.

Anne, tan-bleached and large-eyed, her hair in a braid over her shoulder, lay in a low chair in the side yard of the "Sunny Days." It was not a bad sort of place to be, with the big blue shadow cast by the east wall of the house, the tall cottonwood trees with their multitude of silver-lined, shivering leaves that whisper incessantly in the stillest air, the feathery pepper trees that droop and sag almost to the ground but contrive somehow to keep green and cool the year round, and the wonderfully heavy air beating and beating like a voluptuous heart that has no way of spending its flood-tide of life; every breath is still-born and sapped up in the

A GINGHAM ROSE

dull sand and arid springtime, degeneracy itself in the smiling extravagance and throbbing waste. It is good to lie still and be lazy when the whole world is droning and crooning to no purpose above spilling into one's ears a bee-like lullaby.

Anne had been very ill, despaired of for a time; but tough of fiber and born to live, she took up the fight where the doctors left off. She was wandering slowly back to health, but *so* weak, *so* still of body and soul! The shadowy days and nights of delirium had served their purpose; she had rested while her body and her brain fought it out; all the turmoil and the problems had been laid in a torpor, and the painful memories had seemingly been written on the pale scroll of the incidental. Even her sense of humor wrought no more than an occasional smile. She wondered lazily if she would ever laugh again—or do anything else.

Victor was, it seemed, getting better day by day. He sat near by in another low chair reading a big book and waving a palm-leaf fan, while every now and then he took a sip from a tall glass of lemonade, which, thanks to An-

A GINGHAM ROSE

gelina Gritz, was like the "widow's cruse." He was guiltless of collar, and his white shirt and tan made him look young and strong again. In a country where climate and comfort are engaged in deadly strife Dame Conventionality forgets herself, of course, with an air of conviction, just as she always does the moment her own comfort is involved; and as the Arizona sunshine would take the starch out of a nun's bonnet, things like collars become rapidly extinct. As Anne watched Victor through her half-asleep eyes, she marveled that he had ever irritated her so. For the matter of that, what sense could there be in being irritated about anything? "You have been awfully good to me, Vic," she smiled lazily.

"I?" He closed his book and sat up, putting the glass down by the stone pitcher. Then he got out his pipe and, with skilful thumb-dabs, stuffed the brown little bowl with the pungent weed.

"Don't overdo the smoking." She yawned as she spoke: she liked to see a man smoke.

"I am really better, you think, Nancy, since the M. D. has let me have my pipe again?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"It doesn't need a pipe, Vic, to tell one that."

"Nancy," he began carefully, with his eyes on the pipe, "you are so much better now that I dare speak about it. I must tell you that I have suffered nearly as much as you for that awkwardness of mine the afternoon you were taken ill. I had no business to speak so to you; nor have I now, perhaps. It is going to take a long time to prove if I am mended for good. I don't know what possessed me. I have sense enough to see that the less there is of that sort of thing the better for us both. I was so hungry for a word of hope that the starvation made a beast of me."

"But," she smiled gently, "I haven't thought of it since."

He looked at her in astonishment. Her eyes were sleepy but frank. Could it be that one might rave for days in delirium and hold no memory of it? He sat back, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, to think about it.

As for Anne, her mind moved slowly these days, but the words "hunger," and "starvation," and "hope" turned themselves over and over in her memory. So Victor had really felt all that, too, all the longing she had used to feel, some-

A GINGHAM ROSE

thing like a thousand years ago, it seemed, for John. She smiled at the freak of irony, but she could not resent it; the fight had gone out of her.

"We are 'one and one, with a shadowy third,'" she said to herself slowly. "I am sorry, Vic, that it has worried you. I had nearly forgotten, and certainly I do not mind. I suppose we must both learn to be patient."

"Has any one seen my fur-lined overcoat?" and at the corner of the house, pretending a chill and making a great to-do with the shivering, stood Jerusalem James. Great and gaunt, failing day by day, doomed and aware of it, but grit to the bone and bound to go down with a laugh, he was a better hero than often gets a monument. "Smoking again, Stetson?" he asked curiously, and shambled over to the hammock, sitting with his long legs dangling astride.

"Why, yes, my pipe," said Victor, and though his hand shook, he laughed at himself. "I am rather a baby to feel it so, but the doctor said I might smoke a little, and I can't help hoping it is a milestone back to life."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I congratulate you," sighed James, sadly. Doggedly he took out a package of cigarettes and, lighting up, sent a blue cloud of smoke about his head.

Anne looked at him puzzled. "Why don't you get a pipe, Jimmy J? I am nearly sure those things are bad for you."

For once in a way Jerusalem James was serious. "You see, there are milestones, Mrs. Stetson, whether you are climbing up hill or tumbling down. I smoke now because it doesn't matter what I do. 'A short life and a merry one,' you know, especially as being stupid won't lengthen the time. I've been trying all afternoon to make up my mind what to do with the time there is left. My old mother is coming out, so there is no need of taking a long, tiresome journey. I'll take it comfortably enough a little later, you know. I sent for mother to come out, because I have an absurd horror of being put under this sand-pile. It's too heavy for comfort. The idea has kept me awake nights, and that's foolish. But they chuck you under in less than twelve hours unless some one with the right sits on the box and keeps 'em off. Anyhow, I guess

A GINGHAM ROSE

the mother would rather know. I've two months at the outside. That's why I am smoking."

Victor and Anne were silent; what was there to say? Victor had been walking consciously on the same brink, and so had she, for the matter of that, and they both understood, and Jimmy knew that they did. The two men smoked on, each silently noting the number on his milestone; one, he hoped, pointing on to the long way of life; the other, he knew, toward death.

"Hello there, Danny," sang out Jerusalem James, then bent double with the terrible hacking cough that seemed never to rise above a whisper. He leaned back in the hammock and let the cigarette drop out of his fingers, and Danny went up and stepped on the burning end with a queer look at the tall, shaken fellow. Then he handed Anne two or three letters and grinned, with a glance about.

"Mis' Gritz is a-breakin' me in as chore-boy by a-testin' my muscle by a-havin' me carry up Mis' Stetson's letters. Anybody 'd think you was I don't know what, from the number of letters you get." Then his face sobered. "How are you a-feelin' to-day, Mis' Stetson?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Thank you, Danny, nearly as good as new." She smiled in a way that always put Danny to shifting his hat from hand to hand, till in desperation he would put it back on his head and his hands in his pockets. Danny's adoration was a current joke. "Get yourself a chair and come talk with us. We don't know what is going on in the world and you surely do."

Danny brought a chair and sat astride it where he could watch Anne and if necessary look at the others. He ran his thumb nervously up and down his ornate "braces," then slyly examined the row of closed shutters above their heads, while a look of real concern spread over his face. "Pap an' Mis' Gritz is really a-goin' to get spliced," he said mournfully.

"But Danny," said Anne, "that is all right. Mrs. Gritz is a mighty nice woman."

"Um-m-m-m," ruminated Danny, while he scratched his red head and carefully adjusted his tattered straw hat. "I thought he was jest a-foolin'."

"Poor Mrs. Farrar!" chuckled Jerusalem James, wickedly.

Danny gurgled and slapped his knee. Again

A GINGHAM ROSE

he scanned the window-blinds. "I went around there of an errand soon's I could find one. 'Twas some trouble a-findin' one this time of year, but I worked it. I broke the news to her 'bout like the Irishman to Pat's wife when he had Pat in the coffee-sack. I was awful careful 'bout her feelin's. Women's so easy hurt," he blinked at Anne. "An' if she ain't lit out bag an' baggage for Tombstone! Didn't even have the manners to hire me to drive her to the deepo. Her daughter Jenny runs the Morgue restaurant and saloon up there."

"Sounds cheerful," smiled Anne.

"It's a hell of a place," said Danny, laconically.

"Danny!" said Jerusalem James, solemnly, "I am amazed to hear you swear before ladies!"

"Ain't nothin' to do *but* swear 'bout some things," said Danny, with a grin at Anne. After a while he turned his eyes to Victor. "Seems 's if all men gets married," he remarked.

"Of course," said Victor, with superiority.

Danny laughed. "Seems 's if a fellow gets tired of even watchin' clouds after a while, specially when there ain't no clouds to watch, darn

A GINGHAM ROSE

'em! But," he sat up straight and looked into the shimmering sky, "we'll be a-havin' clouds one of these days now that'll wake you up. Never see a sand-storm, I guess?"

"No, Danny," Anne answered, "and from what I hear I'm not in a hurry to."

"That's right," he said. "They're what you might call busy clouds for sure. None of your little frizzly, woolly, mother's-darlin', do-nothin' clouds that ain't got an idea of bustle above a-settin' down on the sky. They're the real thing. You'll see. I've seen 'em so thick you'd think you was a-dyin'."

"Why, Danny Dixon, ain't you 'shamed yer-self, a-settin' here a-scarin' Mis' Stetson out of her wits! Where's my lump-sugar I sent you up street fer?" Angelina stood at the corner, a substantial contradiction of the reported debilitating effect of heat and activity.

"Sugar?" said Danny, wide-eyed. "Shouldn't think you'd haf to buy no lump-sugar!"

"Now, go long, Danny," and Angelina blushed furiously. "You bring that back double quick from the grocery or I'll speak to yer pap."

A GINGHAM ROSE

She disappeared around the corner, fanning herself with her apron.

"Easy," commented Danny, and started with a great sigh for the grocery.

"Angelina is one good woman," said Jerusalem James. "She has done her best to mother me."

All at once Anne sat up, white and tense. "Where—is Miss Corwin?" she asked low. In her apathy she had not missed her before.

For a while no one answered, and Anne sank back in her chair.

"Angelina was mighty good to her, too," said Jerusalem James.

CHAPTER XXVI

Make your failure tragical by courage, it will
not differ from success.

—THOREAU.

"Oh, Vic, come in here a moment, will you?"

"Hotter than blazes, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

Victor appeared in the doorway between their two rooms. He was collarless, his sleeves were rolled back to his elbows, and his head was lost in a cloud of pipe-smoke. "You are an exasperating youngster, Nancy. You always look cool."

"Do I?" she murmured vaguely. She was sitting on the floor in the midst of a very flood of old letters and papers. By her side was a pasteboard box, the bulging, sagging green sides of which bore witness to long service. She had tied her two braids in a loose loop about her neck to get them out of the dust. Just before her in the center of a cleared space was a large

A GINGHAM ROSE

sealed and tied package done up with manila paper. She sat gazing at it as if fascinated.

"What have you caught, O Chinese Idol?" laughed Victor, making a cautious approach in a wide circle. "Will it bite?"

"That is just what *I* want to know," she sighed. All at once she wheeled about and sat with her back to the package. "Now, Vic, you cut the string and break the seals and open the thing. Right on top there will be a little printed slip. It is nearly certain to be yellow: they always use that color because it is especially annoying. Don't tell me a word of what it says, but roll it into a wad and, and—"

"Put it in my pipe and smoke it?" he suggested. He was more or less in the dark about the reasons for all this ceremony, but it did not require much experience to guess what manner of "bite" such a package might be capable of. Ever since her illness Anne had been wrapped about with a kind of apathy, and he welcomed the sight of the letters and papers as a sign of returning interest in her work. He glanced at her and smiled to himself as he cut the string. She was sitting as if about to be decapitated,

A GINGHAM ROSE

with her head down and her arms clasped about her knees.

"Why, Nancy, it isn't a slip at all, and it isn't yellow. Just listen to this, if you please:

"Dear Miss Preston:

"The inclosed story is, in conception and construction, by far the best thing of yours we have seen, but it is uneven in execution. We feel confident that in tone and style it is not up to the high standard of work you have set for yourself. We have ventured to mark some pages and passages, hoping that you will consider them from our point of view and bring us the story again. It is more than possible we shall be able to bring it out with our fall fiction if you can improve it along the lines we suggest. Hoping—"

"Vic!" she gasped, wheeling about again. "Don't read another word: I can't stand it! This is what comes of being born a woman without common sense enough to pin her faith to dish-washing for a living! There is not a man at large who would have been goose enough to put a manuscript away without looking to see what the editor had to say. It takes a woman more than one natural lifetime to grow up; it does,

A GINGHAM ROSE

indeed. Why, do you know, Vic, I was nearly out of ready money when that thing came back? I might have gone under easily enough with that chance right in my hands. I am so ashamed of myself. It was so childish. Ruth and I buried it in the box just as it was, and Ruth cried, and I asked her to sing a dirge, and I laughed, though I was crying inside. I had had so many things back, and it just seemed to me I could not stand the sight of another editor's regrets." She got to her feet with no trace of the whimsicality that had moved her to call Victor to break the seals and open the package for her. It was one of her moments of real growth. She walked over by the window and stood looking out on the still, sun-soaked tree-tops.

"Would you have gone under, Nancy, without one word to me?"

She turned about and looked at him helplessly. "I suppose I should have, Vic. I always was a mule," she sighed. "And there is no use lying about it, is there?"

"Not a bit," he answered quietly. "I like you for it." He stood looking out at the trees over her head a while. "Did you have a very bad

A GINGHAM ROSE

time getting the work going, girlie?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she smiled, "but a very good time, too, Vic." She looked up at him through her glistening eyes and something shone over her face—the stirring of enthusiasm, perhaps, an enthusiasm that had had a long sleep, but was being thrilled into life again.

"I am going out for a ride before supper, Nancy. I need some exercise badly. I am lazy beyond apology these days. Read over your story while I am gone and see if it is not better than you thought." Before she was able to answer he had gone into his room, snatched up his hat, and with a cheery "good-by" was gone.

She understood his sympathy and tact, and, pulling a chair up close to the open window, she plunged into her book. "Oh," she groaned now and then as she came upon a marked passage, "how conceited I was to try such a thing at all! Why couldn't I have seen that for myself?" Her blue eyes gazed into the tree-tops a while, then grew bright with the old flame of power.

"But I can do it now," she whispered low to herself; "I know I can!" It was as if the secret

A GINGHAM ROSE

was too precious to confide even to the silence, the silence that had never found a voice to speak, even if it had something to tell. She put back her head and closed her eyes and clasped her hands with idle tenderness on the papers in her lap.

"I suppose," she smiled, "one outgrows his stories just as he outgrows his clothes. If one could just get rid of them as completely!" She felt an overwhelming horror of print and wished there was some less glaring fate for one's blunders. Suddenly her eyes opened wide, and, clasping the manuscript, she got to her feet. What had happened? People were running over the house slamming windows and doors. What a strange, terrible chill in the air—a chill that cut into the heat, but did not subdue it. And Victor: where was he? She glanced out of the window; the trees were shuddering as if in fear of something they could not run away from, and a faint pinkish film was veiling the light of day.

Some one rapped furiously on the door. "Sand!" shouted Angelina Gritz from the hall, as she hurried on. "Shut your windows, quick!"

CHAPTER XXVII

The wind bloweth where it listeth.

—ST. JOHN.

Victor had gone over at once to get his pony. As he stepped into the big brown barn he stood still a moment, with his sombrero in his hand, getting his eyes accustomed to the dimness. "Hello, Dixon," he called, as Danny rose and stretched his long arms in a far corner. "Let me have my pony."

"Want him very bad?" groaned Danny, his laziness frankly too much for him. "Nice cool day to pick out for a ride, I must say!" He shambled across the barn floor and disappeared in a stall, and after much comical sighing and complaining he led the pony forth saddled. He walked to the door holding on to the bridle and let his sleepy green eyes travel around the horizon. "Goin' far?" he asked curiously.

"Just far enough to find an appetite for supper."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Which way?" Danny persisted, holding fast to the bridle.

Victor laughed and climbed into the saddle. "What is the matter with you, Danny? Are the Apaches on the warpath, and do you think they'll kidnap me?"

"I was jest a-thinkin' it might blow up a mite," and again Danny's freckles seemed to shift and dance in the wrinkles that circled away from his yawn. "If I was you I'd jest stick to the highway so you can drop in somewhere if it gets thick. Sand ain't extra good for breathin', you know."

"Why, Danny, you croaker, there isn't a speck of cloud in the whole sky!"

"Is that so?" drawled Danny, with a grin, while he crossed his arms tight and seemed to lean on himself from his head to his toes. "Well, I s'pose even a fool croaker hits it now an' then."

"All right," said Victor, over his shoulder, "I'll keep my eyes open."

"You'll shut 'em tight 'nough if it blows up sand," he yelled after the retreating figure, then, with an apathetic glance about, he sank down in his tracks to finish the interrupted nap.

A GINGHAM ROSE

The next thing Daniel Dixon knew was that some one, no other than his pap, was shaking him by the shoulders and shouting in his ear in a strident, irritating key: "Oh, no, my Dan'el ain't 'fraid of work, he ain't; he'll lie right down 'side of it an' go to sleep! Ain't nothin' 'fraid 'bout Dan'el! You dad-blasted, lazy, red-headed idjit, limber up here an' shut the barn doors! There's a sand-storm a-blowin' the roof off yer head, do you hear?"

Danny got awake at once and was upon his feet with amazing alacrity, but not because he minded his pap; he was thoroughly at home with the storm-center and knew the meaning of a "bluff." He made a dive for the stalls and with lightning skill had backed his ponies into place and was harnessing them to the "outfit" before his astonished pap could get his breath. "Thanks fer a-wakin' me up," said Danny, over his shoulder.

"What in thunder you a-doin' now?" gasped the old man, wiping his perspiring brow. "Is that yer idea of a-shuttin' a barn door?"

"Nop, 'tain't," roared Danny, above the wind. "An' don't you go a-shuttin' it, either, before I

A GINGHAM ROSE

get outside. I've got a passenger a-waitin' fer me up the highway. You always 're a-tellin' me to keep my eyes open fer a job!"

"Goin' to take yer cab out in the sand and then 'spect me to do the dustin', more 'n likely," and Danny's pap fanned himself excitedly with his hat. The heat was terrible in the close air.

"More 'n likely," yelled Danny, as he pulled a strap tight and began raising the back of the cab.

"Yer a born fool," grunted his pap. The dust blew in clouds through every crack in the board walls and the trees beat against the roof.

"Guess I come by it natural 'nough," grinned Danny, as he finished fastening the curtains down tightly. Danny and his pap bluffed and played like an old bear and a cub; they were the best of friends and had for each other a wholesome appreciation.

"Where you a-goin', Dan'el?" asked the old man, in a conciliatory tone.

"Seems 's if a fellow never knows jest where he is a-goin' till he's been there an' back to the barn again," grunted Danny, as he pulled his hat about his ears.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Storm seems to be a-lettin' up some," said Danny's pap, going to the door and looking out. It was as dark as the last of twilight. "You'll 'bout ruin yer cab."

Danny jumped up and took the reins and ducked his head as they jolted through the door. "So long, pap," he yelled. "Shut the barn door!" He grinned over his shoulder and his pap grinned back. Then Danny pulled his hat over his eyes and sent the ponies galloping, with their ears back, into the very face of the flying sand.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Between the vanishing of the drop and the vanishing of the man, what difference? A difference of words. But ask yourself what becomes of the dewdrop?

—LAFCADIO HEARN.

The steady tap-tap of the beast's small, precise hoofs seemed the only sound in the whole sleepy world except the quaint, ceaseless hum of summer-time, which one feels rather than hears. Victor and the pony kept close on the blue in the pattern of pink and blue which the conspiring shapes and the sun spread on the dusty highway till it stretched away before them like the unfolded scroll of some Japanese picture-book.

The young man's heart was beating high for the moment: at last he had seen Anne come out of her torpor, had left her with something like the old love of work shining on her face and her story in her hands; had left her that she might the more easily find herself. He had never pushed his own work very far, but he knew

A GINGHAM ROSE

enough to leave her to do the choosing at her crossways. The moods of healthy women and of sick men are changeable as the springtime breezes; the flames need so much fanning.

He looked about him curiously as he rode along the deserted streets, by the houses with their tightly closed shutters. Even the irrigating canals were demoralized to sluggishness by the perpetual reflecting of laziness. The whole town was two inches in dust and none the wiser! Here and there between houses, or down the side streets, he caught glimpses of the desert or a plucky square patch of alfalfa, and always the sky-line of violet mountains that looked thin as glass against the blue sky. He was in a basin, a basin of dry, sun-glazed ware that caught the light with a kind of persistent opalescent idiocy, a basin in which a few men crawled, "not so much by the grace of God as by the oversight of the devil."

But to-day the place was pregnant, and in the strangely heavy heat Victor felt the full throb of life; his own blood flowed in tune, and the pony with his brown, satiny coat moved along easily. There was pure beauty, an animal at-

A GINGHAM ROSE

oneness of things around and about. The air was dry wine and his mood held the cup. For an uncounted space of time he caught and held a clean, clear sense of the possibilities of the vast unworked desert about him; he thrilled to realize man's part in the big play, his power of mind to force and drive arid blanks to fruition. He dreamed a rich future and saw a vision of the dream fulfilled in the quivering ready air.

Like butterflies, fancies struck across the sun-spots; he sensed the kinship between sun-spot and gold-fruit; between moonlight and white-bloom. Fancies made of truth flickered about him fearlessly, familiarly, and for once in a way it was given him to live beyond bonds. The water in the canals moved with the pony, the stray leaves that whirled and careened on their light way turned boats for more fancies. He pulled off his hat and worshiped. He did not laugh; he did not think: living in the pure does not burden itself with expression; it simply *is*.

Then an idea played the mischief with his peace and sent the mood a-flying, and he turned man, man so full of wise judgments and grave, responsible comparisons! He wondered that

A GINGHAM ROSE

other men were not out having a look at the play of life. He felt a duty commanding him to root them out. Now and then a man, never a woman, shot like an arrow across the way from one awning to another, aimed straight for shelter. Had any asked him why he did not stop he would have answered, "Nothing ever happens in the summer-time. Why should a man ruin his eyes in the glare?" Nothing ever happens! And this in a land of sunrise and twilight, of moonrise and dawn! Blind, dead-alive puppets, puppets of a lazy ingrowing gaze, babbling wisely that "nothing ever happens in the summer-time!"

And so his spirits fell even as they had risen. Now that he was caught by the fiend of moralizing again, the moment of high living looked like a fine kind of torture, a tantalizing glimpse just to let him know what health might mean.

During Anne's illness and delirium she had brought him face to face with some bitter, undisguised truths. For long hours he had sat by her bed listening while she babbled with awful frankness, a frankness that was pathetic enough in its stinging, unsparing cruelty from a girl whose life had been gentle and tactful toward

A GINGHAM ROSE

every thing that breathes. Until then he had had no real idea of the self-struggle she was enduring, and as he listened he pitied her more than he pitied himself. On the heels of the delirium followed a silent period of inertia, while life ebbed low and the brain seemed dead. She came back to life with a new, fresh-washed child-likeness in her eyes; she seemed tainted by not so much as a memory of the old struggle; she showed him a friendship that was frank if apathetic, sincere if shallow. She was broken to her harness. Poor girl! One takes lightly enough the antics, the restlessness, the rebellion of the first alarming touches of harness on a spirited colt, but when the day comes and the spirit breaks it is quite another business. Be the trainer never so hard-shelled, he will rub the quivering nose and whisper into the stubborn ears the astonishing news that he has been through the very same thing himself; and if no one is looking a lump of sugar will more than likely rise to the light of consolation.

Victor would gladly have given up anything, even the girl's friendship, for a return of her old stormy, impulsive whimsicalities. He had

A GINGHAM ROSE

come to understand that she could never love him, though she died of the trying. He had come to see that for him, as his God had chosen to make him, she, as her God had chosen to make her, *could* give him no more than friendship, and that even this would fly away frightened, unless he learned to accept it with no trace of a hope of something more to come.

His spirit went down and down once the drooping began. For he had a secret, and some day when the time should come he must tell it to Anne. The secret held her release. It would not be so long before she would be going back to the life she was born to. Well, he at least might send her better equipped to make her fight than before; that was his portion. The doctors said he was better, but what, after all, did they really know of *him*? There was no reason why they should lie to him; he was no more of a coward than the others; he understood that they believed he was better, but he knew that they were wrong. They could not know, he took good care of that, how night and day a dreary conviction was tugging at his heart-strings, a dull-eyed dread was sulking in his

A GINGHAM ROSE

heart and putting its cool finger to the quick, while he sat laughing with Anne and James, his two closest friends!

After all, even friendship in the big moments is just the king of ironies. James envied him that he was getting well, and Anne was so glad for him! And all the time his eyes rested on the inevitable fog that blurred his path. Sometimes on the stillest, warmest, gayest, sunniest days a wisp of the gray coolness wafted and stirred across his senses, whispering that fighting was no use. Life is a good thing and hard to give up; death is cold and God knows what else.

And Anne, the girl, warm-hearted and true as steel; Anne, for whom he hoped so much, whom he wanted to stay by and help, it broke his heart to leave her. The individual want and hope, the selfish longing of the man dies with an agony terrible, and it brought the cold drops to his forehead. He was afraid. He knew that in his eyes was coming the same look of self-hunted terror that he had furtively watched in the eyes of James and the Corwin girl. He shivered and looked up about him and for a moment wondered if he had already died. The pony had come to

A GINGHAM ROSE

a standstill and was tossing his head and sniffing the air. All the sun-soaked warm world had changed and the sun itself had gone out. Danny's storm was coming!

Beyond the row of cottonwood trees and the canal the desert stretched away like a floor, with its repellent carpet of dry sage-brush and cactus and its sense of dust-colored crawling things. Over the mountains to the north and the west hung a great pinkish-brown curtain of dust and sand. The sun was nearing the end of the day's entertainment and sending shaft on shaft of splendid color through the tawny veil. The curtain rose steadily, converting the sky into an inverted desert and, bit by bit, taking up the desert floor. The cold wind came marching like a herald of woe in advance of the storm, putting everything in its way to shivering and shuddering.

Victor bent low over the pony, turned him, and let him go as he would, but it was no use; they had come farther than he thought, and long before they reached the edge of town the storm swooped down and the day was turned into night. The air was drowned out in sand and

A GINGHAM ROSE

dust, and the pony stopped and stood quivering. The violent riding and the suffocating air had begun their work, and the cough tore and rasped at the walls of Victor's lungs. He dismounted and groped his way to a tree and tied the bridle. He dared not think and he could not breathe. He stood close to the pony and put his face against the brown neck, and making a hollow of his hands, tried to keep the sand out for one good breath, but the clogged air would not be beaten back and he felt the terrible giving-way. In despair he sank down with his head on his arms and clutched at the dust for strength. Then the warm blood began its pitiless flowing.

So Danny found him, faint from suffocation and the loss of blood. With the help of the boy's strong arms he was able to crawl to shelter in the cab. Danny soaked a handkerchief in the canal and bathed his face with the gentleness of a girl.

Victor smiled his thanks. "Better get to the doctor's as soon as you can, Danny," he whispered with the huskiness that comes after the hemorrhage.

"You bet," said Danny, bravely, and with a

A GINGHAM ROSE

quick look to see that the pony was securely tied, he jumped to his seat and drove as fast as he dared. Jolting would start the blood again. The moment he saw Victor safe in the doctor's hands he was off with the cab to find Anne.

Angelina Gritz met him at the curb. She was walking up and down watching for Victor. She had left Anne sitting by Jerusalem James while she came down to watch. Danny told his story briefly and with no more self-glory than logic demanded.

Angelina's blue eyes filled and the big tears rolled down her round cheeks. She put a plump hand on Danny's big freckled one.

"I must say, Danny," she gulped, "you've got some sense back of yer foolish face, after all!" Her voice broke in her sympathy for Anne and this first moment of real motherliness for Danny. She wiped her eyes on her apron. "An' Jimmy's awful bad, too, an' won't let Mis' Stetson out of his sight. She sent me down here to watch for him. How can I tell her?"

"Gosh," sighed Danny. "Go 'long. I'll wait." He blinked into space, and wiped the dust off his face, then set his mouth tight.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne did not say a word when Angelina told her, but went into her room and got her hat and went straight down to the cab. She put her hand on Danny's sleeve in mute appeal. Danny drove like the wind. She found Victor better, but too weak to do more than look at her. She sank down by him and put her arm under his head.

Danny bolted. He was conscious of nothing in particular till he found himself riding the pony back to the stable. He looked about him curiously. The world was clearer than before the storm and as tranquil in the twilight as if no wind had ever passed that way. The air was rarely sweet and pure and seemed hypocritically to deny any memory of the havoc and life-taking of an hour before.

"Somethin' wrong 'bout the whole dad-blasted game," grumbled Danny.

CHAPTER XXIX

As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

—THE PSALMS.

"But, Vic, you are better, I am sure. The hemorrhage was pretty bad, but no one would dream you had had it now. It need not happen again if you are careful."

"Do you think so, Nancy? That is just because you are under the glamour of the sunshine and because it is your woman's way to believe what you hope. Of course, I'd have gone long before this if we hadn't come out here. The place has served a good turn. And I have you with me: that makes everything worth while. I am not afraid or unhappy about it any more. That is where the advantage of being ill a long time comes in: you become reconciled. And lately, since you have seemed your old self again, I have been very well contented. I think, perhaps, Nancy, it has all been sweeter and finer as

A GINGHAM ROSE

it is than if you had been to me just what the most of the woman-world is to most of the man-world. Perhaps we have come out somewhere, after all. We are not afraid of each other any more, are we? And I know I love you better than when we came away, and that is proof that I am better, for I loved you as much as I could when we came. But lately I have felt satisfied; all the old restlessness is gone. And that is a sure sign, Nancy, for life is ready to stop when a man is satisfied."

The girl was silent. Her heart and the moment were full, there was no room left for words. To argue with a man who has told you tranquilly that he is about to die is sacrilege. After an interval that neither of them thought to measure, she asked in a voice low enough to keep out the quivering: "What do you want to do, Victor? Would you rather stay here a while longer and see if you don't feel better, after all?"

"Let's go away, Nancy. Would it upset the work?"

"Where would you rather go?" she asked gently.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, dear, answer me. The book?"

"Victor," she begged, "what is a book, or a thousand books? Nothing matters but that you are as well and as happy as possible. Besides," she struggled bravely to find a smile, "it is a poor sort of book that can't stand a change of climate. It does not matter. I'll put it away and we'll go for the rest of the hot months and then come back to work for the winter."

"We'll not be coming back, Nancy."

"Don't!" she whispered.

"But, Anne, I don't want you to feel like that about it. I have only one horror in the world now and that is of dying here. Everything is dead here already and when I do go I want to go from the midst of life. Every one seems to feel so. Jimmy does, I know, for we have talked about it. But it seems to be Jimmy's fate, and it is not mine. I need not stay and I won't. It's been terrible watching Jimmy go by inches, watching himself too, that is the worst of it. The place is a mockery, Anne. The sunshine glitters and promises like a baubled cynic. It just dawdles over the inevitable, makes jokes in the face of the sacred and plays with a man's breath cat-

A GINGHAM ROSE

and-mouse-wise. It does not give one back his life, it just cheats death for a while with a compromise. It's childish and cowardly of me, but I can not stay here and see the last of Jimmy. Ridiculous, lovable Jerusalem James that he is! I can't stand it. I think we are making it hard for him too. Why, Anne, the place is cruel with its flaunting waste of life in the very face of a starving man. The other day as I rode out in the country, the day of the storm, I had such a glimpse of brute health as I had never imagined. I saw and felt all through me what flood-tide life might mean; for a while everything was as plain as day. I fairly reeked in hope; I was strong and useful; I understood and was willing to do my part in the big scheme of things; I got into a kind of enthusiastic vision of what this country is bound to become and I felt all the thrill of the pioneer with a work to do. For once I stood on a level with my Maker and looked at Him face to face. But do you think it could last? By no means; it was to tantalize me, it was the cat and the mouse. That was the top of my climb, Nancy. I suppose an hour of the truth is enough to send a man on with, after all.

A GINGHAM ROSE

And the cat and the mouse have so little to do with the big scheme of things, when all is said and done."

"Where would you like to go, Victor?"

"Why, let's go on a sort of jaunt, let's take the game into our own hands and go in for a little of the cheating ourselves. It's a wild notion, running away from the inevitable, isn't it? This will be a strange year for you, Nancy. It will seem to you like a dream one of these days. You have a long way to go, Anne: I know you have, because you have the spirit to make the fight. I'd like being around somewhere to watch you, but I have about served my purpose for you, just as this place here has served for me. I wish I might see the finish of the story, too, for somehow I have a feeling that it is going to have much to do with whatever is in store for you. You'll make it, no matter what happens, you are such a sandy-hearted little baggage." He put his hand over hers and smiled with a boyishness that broke her heart. Her eyes were wet, and he looked away and sent a cloud of pipe-smoke between them. He and Jerusalem James were smoking for the same reason now.

A GINGHAM ROSE

There was so strange a finality in all that he said that a mood of complete acceptance seemed to envelope her against her will. "Where shall we go?" she repeated half-consciously.

"I have been looking things up," he said briskly. "We are going to Santa Fé. It's away up in the mountains, you know; I'll take you that much farther with me." He smiled and stroked her hand. "I found a man who had just been there the other day and he told me all about it. He wishes he had not come away. There is a big Catholic institution that seems to be a hotel if one is well and a hospital if one is ill. There is an old orchard in the court and he says the youngsters from the orphanage go through there in their communion dresses in the early morning. Sounds pretty, does it not? There is a big church and you can go into the chapel right from the house if you like. Next door to the place is an old garden that belonged once to some thrifty bishop. The place is deserted now and any one may go who likes. There are lakes and walks and benches and a rickety little gate, and more trees, Anne. Think of apple

A GINGHAM ROSE

trees after all this death. I want to be there this minute, don't you?"

She smiled and put her other hand on his for answer.

"There are Sisters, too, and they are good to you if you are ill. The man says they are mostly middle-aged, with ripe, jolly faces; faces, he said, 'that had made up their minds.' It must rest a fellow to look at that sort. Shall we go?"

"Oh yes, we'll go," she sighed.

"Do you suppose Marr could come out?" he asked.

"I shall write him, of course," she answered. "I know he will come."

"But, Nancy, I tell you one thing," he sat up and looked into her eyes eagerly; "you have got to help me away from here without saying good-bye to Jimmy. We must go without his knowing it. He couldn't stand it any more than I could. I don't care how it looks, it has got to be done!"

Anne rose and stood over him looking down on his face. They were in her room by the open window. Since his last sickness they had been drawn very close together and there was between them the grown-up acknowledgment of

A GINGHAM ROSE

human-aloneness. With a sweep of tenderness that told the girl something new, she stooped and caught his face close against her breast and pressed her cheek against his forehead. "Victor," she whispered, and her low voice fluttered across his closed eyes—eyes that were closed to find the darkness that brings the better seeing.

CHAPTER XXX

The shadows come and go;—the Shadow-Maker shapes for ever.

—LAFCADIO HEARN.

After dinner that same evening while Victor went in to talk with Jerusalem James, Anne walked over to the stable to find Danny. The summer dusk is long in Arizona and marvelously still. She found him sitting in an old wooden chair tipped back against the barn door where he could keep watch over the stable and at the same time get the benefit of the evening light without exertion. Danny's was the art of compromise. From the big open door by his side came the smell of fresh straw, the muffled thump of hoofs on the wooden floor and the peaceful munching of some gourmand over his supper of sweet alfalfa. Danny jumped out of his chair, and the whip he had been mending flew when the hem of Anne's white dress got in the way of his eyes. He jerked off his hat and held it awkwardly in his big hands so that it covered his

A GINGHAM ROSE

mouth, where he always felt his embarrassment most, and his green eyes blinked at her unbelievably over the yellow straw brim.

"Danny," she smiled, "I have come to talk over something important with you. Are we quite alone?"

"Yes'm," said Danny, overcome and made meek by unexpected honors. "Pap's a-drivin' a party of tenderfoots out to the ostrich farm by moonlight an' the land only knows when they'll think they've had 'nough. Ain't nothin' round to hear but the—quadrupeds!" He waved his hat eloquently toward the barn where the twilight caught a switching tail at the end of almost every stall. Big words always helped Danny to his ease. She took the chair he offered her, while he sat on the ground with his back against the barn.

"Can you keep a secret, Danny?" she asked.

"If 'tain't worth tellin'," grinned Danny.

"Depends on whose 'tis."

"Would you keep one for me?"

"Jest watch me," and he hitched his back convincingly and sent his old hat spinning across the barn floor like a top.

A GINGHAM ROSE

Anne's eyes followed the hat absently and rested on it when it stopped. "Danny," she said at last, "we are going away."

"You're a-what?" and Danny peered up into her face. He was puzzled. The Stetsons were not the sort of people who usually made a secret of their departure. He waited breathlessly for her to tell the rest, but while he waited he said to himself that if Stetson was the biggest fraud on earth and had busted banks or sent as many as a dozen deservin' sinners where they belonged, it would take more'n horsepower to get anything that would hurt *her* out of him. Her next words were almost a disappointment; he longed to be tested.

"Mr. Stetson is not so well, Danny. He is discouraged, and wants to get up to the mountains for a while." She turned her eyes to his and let them tell him the dreary news she had not the heart to voice.

"I've noticed he was a-lookin' peekid," said Danny. "It was that damn storm did it,—and me a-sleepin' here when I ought to have been out a-lookin' for him. I feel as if it was all my fault."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"But, Danny, you know very well that if you hadn't found him, he'd have died out there alone. He said you saved him. But he told me to-day, Danny, that he has always known he would never get well."

"It's hell, ain't it?" said Danny, simply.

"I suppose it is," answered Anne, seriously. "Will you help me about something, Danny?"

"You bet I will," he said, his face all wrinkled in his eagerness.

"You know when people are sick they feel things so much, and he has an idea that he can't stand it to say good-by to Jerusalem James. He wants—for Jimmy's sake as well as his own, for Jimmy is so ill that anything might end him, you know—to get away without his knowing it. Do you see?"

"That's right," said Danny, swallowing hard. "I'd like to get out of a-seein' him myself. He's so darned joky he 'bout upsets me. He's got sand, I tell you."

"I knew you would understand," Anne sighed. "Now Jimmy is in his room long before sundown, but it is a front room, you know, and we must be very careful. Is there a night train, Danny?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

Danny got up and went into the stable. In a moment he struck a match and lighted a lamp in the office. Anne watched him hunting over a lot of paper on an old table, his awkward shadow climbing up the board wall behind him. He brought out a time-table and looked up the trains for her. They could leave at nine in the evening.

"It is just a question of days now with Jimmy, and since Mr. Stetson has made up his mind, he is nervous and anxious to be off. Mrs. Gritz says she will help me with the packing and I am sure we can be ready by to-morrow night. Will you have the cab there a little before nine?"

"You are a-goin' fer good?" asked Danny, the mournful idea just occurring to him.

"I wish that I knew," she answered low. She rose and held out her hand. "There is no use trying to thank you, Danny. There isn't any way."

Danny blushed mightily, but he took the hand with his best reverence. "It's worth somethin' a-meetin' a woman who ain't stuck up," he said firmly.

After she had gone, Danny stood against the

A GINGHAM ROSE

barn-door watching till her white dress disappeared around the corner. Then he found the whip, got his hat and put it on straight and went into the office. He sat by the table with the lamp at his elbow and mended the whip with great care, and his big shadow mocked and dogged him and told all the things Danny was trying to keep from himself, after the manner of men's shadows. When his pap came home, he found the boy asleep with his head on his arms. "A-wastin' good oil when you can't find no more daylight, hey?" grumbled the man, watching him as he put up the horses. The tourists had tired the old man out and bored him exceedingly. "Dan'el," he said, gently putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, "did you think you was a-bed?"

CHAPTER XXXI

So, ye have wrought me
Designs on the night of our knowledge,—yea,
ye have taught me,

So,

That haply we know somewhat more than we know.

—SIDNEY LANIER.

Danny Dixon drove as quietly as he could, and the thick dust helped by muffling the hoof-beats, but the wicked silence seemed to revel and gloat over every little sound, seemed to catch it up and cherish it, to thrust or persuade it into every corner of the aching emptiness. In the late afternoon there had been a flurry of sand and the night was so clear it seemed raw. From the back stoop where Angelina went for a look about, she announced to the cook inside that the sky was "a-shinin' like a new tin." And so it was. The stars were polished till they fairly cried out, and they seemed so near, almost as if they might get in the way. Danny detested such a night: he said it made his freckles all

A GINGHAM ROSE

hurt and show in the dark. It was like looking into a still pool of water full of unwavering shadows; worse than that, because one seemed to be in the pool and no way out. In short, a fine night for death and hysterics. The "Sunny Days" loomed twice its size and the pepper trees in the front yard shone an unearthly green. The shades in Jerusalem James' windows were drawn, but the crack at the edges showed bright and the rents in the cotton here and there spilled more light. Danny was just on time and he knew it and tried to settle with patience to wait. But he wriggled with suppressed excitement and at last put his straw hat under the seat. He felt irritated, and, though he called himself an old woman, he could not shake off the presentiment that something was going to happen. Then the other three conspirators came noiselessly around the house from the back door. Victor was pale, and looked neither to the right nor the left; Anne was tense, and plainly felt responsible and guilty; Angelina was carrying more than she could in the matter both of baggage and emotion, and in spite of Danny's wide-eyed scorn and Anne's mute appealing, she thickened the air

A GINGHAM ROSE

with her tears and her whispered regrets and admonitions. "Shut up, can't you?" whispered Danny, frantically, for he had seen a shadow on the window-shade upstairs. The two jumped in, and without waiting for orders he shook the reins and turned the cab with a jolt. A broad bar of clear light suddenly fell directly on the cab, and Jerusalem James, gaunt and eager, peered out. In the moment the eyes of the two sick men fixed on each other, and somewhere in the dark Fate laughed. Danny grabbed his whip and swung it wide, but the noise and lurching could not drown the low human cry of giving up that came from the window. Anne got frantically to her knees and waved her handkerchief. She tried to call "good-by," but her voice would not come. Victor sat huddled with his face in his hands and did not say a word. He was having a look at himself, naked and convicted, a mite who had tried to escape a bit of pain that lay across his path! Fortunately the time before the train came in was full. Danny must be argued with to accept pay for the cab, and the tickets and the trunks had to be attended to. Then, somehow, the thing was over. Slowly

A GINGHAM ROSE

and steadily the train drew out of the station and became a smaller and darker patch on the night, with a flicker of light and a trail of white smoke above it. Danny found himself on the platform more alone and bewildered than ever in his life before.

CHAPTER XXXII

And if the soul grows wiser toward evening,
the sorrow will grow wiser too that the soul has
fashioned for itself in the morning.

—MAETERLINCK.

The evening world was like the inside of some fine old seashell. Alexander Marr and Victor Stetson were walking slowly back and forth in the bishop's garden. Somehow, at that time of day, the garden seemed at one with the space of quiet sky just overhead, and to look with a kind of ripe patience and humor upon the color riot in the west and the sympathetic excitement in the east. The gnarled trees made things over into stained glass every way one turned. The frogs, no respecters of silence and the "prayer hour," gave voice to their perpetual pleasantries in great, water-soaked croaks, or took arrowy flight to the cool, brown depths of the pond with an artful kicking of trim, green legs. They made magic circles sweep away from a central splash which boasted that it was easy

A GINGHAM ROSE

enough to take a hand in this much-prated matter of landscape. The two men, both so tall and so slight, moved with the deliberation that tells of a to-morrow allowed to take care of itself. The greater elasticity and strength of the older man was evident, and here in the garden, seemed just. It was as if the old trees, the old garden, the old man, all the old world, had asked the young man in as a guest, that before he went on his way he might have a frank while with the things that are tough of heart through long living—things that have almost finished a long, hard fight and are allowed by grace to stay a while and look on with earned patience and no little entertainment. When they walked toward the west they faced the sunset, and the blurred, stubborn towers of the Catholic church, and over all the fine tracery of trees. When they walked toward the east they faced the same tracery of trees, a tracery that is never the same, and through and beyond, the white-capped old mountains with their tattered veils of dark cedar, which some big hand seemed to have raked down here and there for spite, laying bare the tough ribs of rock.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Marr," said Victor, "I want to talk with you about John Warren."

"He has never married, Stetson; you knew that?"

"Yes, I knew; Aunt Agatha wrote me. I never had the courage,—or the wickedness, to tell Anne. I am sure she is happier just now in not knowing. Besides, you see, it wasn't to be for very long. A sick man is selfish, do what he will, and begrudges even what he does not possess. But while Anne was ill she told me the truth about a good many things; poor little girl! It is right that she should care for him, Marr. His work is better and better. I think he has been finding himself, too. They were made for each other; it was so, and I knew it from the first time they met. You know when a woman really loves a fellow, the more faults, the more she loves. The little girl has had a pretty disheartening experience thus far, but she has made a plucky fight."

"She has changed very much," said Marr, gently. "Is Warren worth her? I never quite liked him."

"He's worth her if she loves him, Marr," said

A GINGHAM ROSE

Victor, stubbornly. "Women's lives are made not so much of fact as of what they want fact to be. Besides, you saw the worst side of him. I want you to promise me that you will never say a word against him to Anne; that you will give them their chance."

"An old man can do no more than mind his own business, Stetson," he smiled in his grim-gentle way and put his hand on the young man's bent shoulder.

"It won't matter what you do in the long run. They'll find each other now without help and in spite of interference."

"The law pauses before women," grumbled Marr.

"The last year has been a sort of purgatory for the girl, but she has made the most of it, of herself, and of me. We like to ease up responsibility by saying, 'she is better for it,' but enough is enough. All her life she has been giving, and getting mighty little in return. The world is a stupid sponge and it gets fat off women like Anne."

"She has a man's brain in her head," said

A GINGHAM ROSE

Marr, clasping his hands behind him and gazing into the pond.

"Yes, but a woman's heart in her breast, and that mixes things."

"Women are mostly in a mess these days," said the old man, gently, tossing a pebble into the water and peering at the rings through his glasses.

"Not much," laughed Victor, watching him. "Blind happiness is a thin dream and they are shaking it off, but they'll find something else to put on. Femininity will never be unadorned. To stay blind through a lifetime looks something like stupidity, and Anne is not stupid."

"No, God help her, she is not."

Victor laughed and threw aside his cigarette. "You are hedging, Marr. You know as well as I do that God *can't* help her. He could put her here, perhaps, but she has got to help herself."

Both men turned suddenly and waited, watching Anne as she came through the gate and down the path under the old trees. She was dressed in thin white stuff, and the glow in the west drew a line like fire all around her and turned the white to bluest shadow. There was

A GINGHAM ROSE

a new kind of freshness on her face, the sort of purity that comes after the furnace, the purity that is gained and not born.

"So you thought to run away from me?" She looked from one to the other. "I am not so easily defeated. When I am not invited and wish to go, I simply argue that it is an oversight and go at once to save my host the pain of embarrassment! Besides," she looked about and smiled, "where is the sense of two men in a garden without *me*?"

"Perhaps we came to hear ourselves talk about you," suggested Marr.

"You don't frighten me in the least. The place is too benign for slander: you couldn't."

"We didn't," admitted Victor, and putting his arm across the girl's shoulder, they strolled along three abreast.

A cheery face that glowed in the dusk, a "face that had made up its mind" and was finally framed in the white linen of a Sister of Mercy, peered through the twilight over the sanatorium wall. One of her invalids out in the night air! The face grew anxious, then something like a memory crossed the old blue eyes, and the Sister

A GINGHAM ROSE

mercifully turned away and let her invalid and the night air be. What did it really matter? Gently her fingers stole over the rosary and she slipped into the chapel, remembering many things.

CHAPTER XXXIII

June's twice June since she breathed it with me.

—BROWNING.

SIX MONTHS LATER.

An editor sat in his office high up in one of the New York city hives, glanced at his watch and re-read a note before him. The note was signed "Anne Preston Stetson," and assured him that she would be very glad to come in and talk things over at two o'clock on Thursday afternoon, as he had suggested. Alexander Marr had been mediator in all matters of business about her book, so, thus far, her contact with the office had been impersonal. To have wedged a book, and a "first book" at that, through the swarm of mad, money-hungry aspirants with pockets and hands bursting with popular *works*, was, for one moment at least, impressive. The fact that a strong book is by a woman will never cease to salt and pepper the situation so long as woman continues to be the inductor of fiction into the mat-

A GINGHAM ROSE

ter of every-day fact. Is she young, or is she oldish? Is she a "lady," or does she wear drooping tidies and autumn-leaf hats? These things are unimportant? Yes, they are, as far as the book is concerned,—that stands or falls according to its own particular spine,—but, that being established, curiosity has merely had a tonic.

"Mrs. Stetson?" The editor rose abruptly and the blond boy in buttons, who had deigned to show her in, evaporated according to rule. The editorial eyes took up the editorial broom and swept. As the solemn moment proceeded, Anne remembered having read somewhere that "the essential thing in politics is to look grave," and in spite of herself she laughed. The editorial palm thought in its sleeve it would like to shake hands, but the editor compromised by offering a comfortable chair.

"I am Mrs. Stetson," she confessed with a smile of reserved amusement; she was something of an adept with the broom herself. She settled herself comfortably by his desk in the proffered chair,—the chair that is either electrocution or a throne, according to the editorial temperature. She clasped her hands loosely on the little shelf

A GINGHAM ROSE

that pulls out by a china knob at the corner of the editorial desk, bridging the gap between authority and hope and making mortal conversation possible. She fixed her eyes on her soft mouse-colored gloves and thought things over: how commonplace "moments" are when they do arrive!

The editor was saying things she used to dream about as a goal: now, she had worked so hard, and waited so long, it all seemed like wages rather than glitter. But, after all, something must be said to the editor, who was really going out of his way to tell her what he thought. And he did seem to see what she had intended. "Thank you," she smiled remotely; "it is very good and comforting to be so understood."

"Now," he continued briskly, "the book must be illustrated. It deserves to be!"

Anne raised her brows. "That sometimes turns out to be anything but a just reward," she remarked.

The remark produced the editorial smile. "And," he continued, "we hope you will agree with us that Warren is just the man to do the work."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Warren!" she gasped; "John Warren?" One hand in its soft glove caught at the edge of the shelf.

Evidently the editorial broom had stirred a bit of dust on the calm imperturbability of this young person after all. He glanced shrewdly at her face. "You—like his work?"

Every beat of the girl's heart made circles of her thoughts that all came back to John; of his work she could not think. After what seemed to her an age of silence she heard herself say, "Oh, yes, his work is very beautiful. I had not hoped for anything so good."

"Warren is in the art editor's office this afternoon, talking over some work, and if it interests you to meet him—in fact, I asked him to drop in here on his way out."

"Did you—tell him why?" she asked as quietly as she could.

"Oh, no," said the editor. "I merely spoke of a new book. I'll just ring and ask him if he won't come right up."

Anne took herself sternly in hand. To meet him after all this time; after all that had happened; in a stuffy, dusty office; in the presence

A GINGHAM ROSE

of the editorial broom; with prosaic chimneys, and telegraph poles, and a tinker mending a water-spout all looking in through the window—it was ridiculous; if she could only *remember* that it was ridiculous perhaps she could get through it. She knew she would be able to read at a glance if Catherine and John were happy, would know if life were dealing gently with them. And all the time the editor was talking to her about important matters; she must listen and talk too. When she heard John's step coming down the hall she wanted to fly. He stopped to talk with some one on the way and at the sound of his voice she turned her chair so that the strong light fell on the top of her broad hat and put her face completely in shadow. Looking into the light and not expecting her, he would not be able to see.

John came in with his hat cocked on the back of his head and an air of brisk, business-like thoroughness about him that overwhelmed her. The last time she had seen him in Marr's house he had been a boy and very much upset. Here was a man, self-possessed, as well groomed, scrubbed and shining as ever, but with a some-

A GINGHAM ROSE

thing frank and robust, something of the real, of the master-workman about him that was in itself assurance and commanded respect. As his eyes fell on her he pulled off his hat; it was simply the impersonal act of a man that respects any woman. For one moment he peered into the strong light, then gave it up and turned to the editor and shook his hand with a boyishness that was delightful.

"Warren," said the editor, "I want to present you to Mrs. Stetson. Hers is the book I mentioned."

For a space of time John stood without turning, bracing himself. Anne saw, and found her courage. Then he turned with a will and the big strong hands closed about the mouse-colored gloves till they were lost to sight.

The editorial properties nearly received to their list a new member in the garb of an astonished whistle, but dignity compromised with a laugh, and the precedents reposed secure. "I did not guess I was restoring old friends."

The two stood absorbing each other, each self-unconscious in his anxiety to read the other's face.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Yes," Anne heard herself say, "I knew Mr. Warren when I was quite a little girl."

There was an editorial chuckle in the air. Really, it was not bad, during a day's work, to bring two people together who were still young enough to be flurried.

And Anne's heart began singing its old thoughtless tune: no stopping to think about a real heart-tune! She told herself that while much was all wrong a great deal was all right. For John had come back to her through her work; without any responsibility on their part they had been decreed to work together. Surely no one might begrudge her that, not even Catherine. Radiantly she smiled through the window on the amazed tinker. But long years of mending leaky spouts and gazing in upstairs windows had taught him that amazement and "far to fall" make a bad combination, and he was a wary tinker—so no harm was done! Besides, it was a beautiful smile, a smile to do a tinker good and set him thinking.

The little office was full of words that sounded to the two like "speech half-asleep and song half-awake!" "Costume, character, type, pe-

A GINGHAM ROSE

riod," such words they were; the sort of talk that illustrators listen to with fine patience, then straightway forget or do with as they please. Then they went away together, down in the elevator and out into the street. At the corner John stopped and looked down under the wide hat-brim, just as he had used to do.

"Well?" he asked. "Pronounce sentence, Nancy. Am I to go back to banishment?—which I won't—or am I really resurrected?"

"Come with me," she said recklessly. "I want some tea and you never would have tea in your studio."

John smiled oddly.

Again she remembered Catherine and wondered bitterly if she had converted John's orderly place into a pink tea-room. His work did not smack of picture hats and musical numbers, but time would tell.

Then came a car-ride that was accomplished but not realized, and at last she put the key in the door of her apartment.

John looked about the charming room with its two big windows that took in the spring-

A GINGHAM ROSE

dressed tree-tops of Washington Square, then his eyes traveled appreciatively over the room.

"The things were Victor's mother's," she said gently.

"And Victor?"

"Victor died last October."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"There is not very much that can be told. He made a hard fight of it, but it was no use. And he was very happy in the end. Doctor Marr came out and was with us in October. Victor was the best man I have ever known, John."

"Yes, he was," said John, sincerely.

Anne put aside her hat and coat. She had let her maid go out for the afternoon, so she went to the kitchen to fill the kettle.

"I have such a good girl, John," she smiled as she lighted the lamp. "She darns and mends, cooks and thinks for me. It is a beautiful way to live, but I am getting wretchedly lazy and spoiled."

"The book doesn't sound like laziness," he smiled.

She wanted to ask him about Catherine, she

A GINGHAM ROSE

even felt she must. Sentence after sentence was framed but would not come forth. The afternoon wore dizzily away and still he had not mentioned his wife to her. What did it mean? She was beginning to feel hurt and asked herself bitterly if he had only come back into her life to humiliate her all over again.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
I' the sun and air; so time treats ugly deeds:
They take the natural blessing of all change.

—BROWNING.

About four o'clock of the same afternoon Marr started for Anne's to get his usual cup of tea and to hear about her interview with the publisher. It was a delicious spring day, and he loitered across Washington Square, giving the passer-by a glimpse of a face that tells of liking life after a long time of it. The birds were north again, and there was no end of house-warming going on in the new leaves. One young fellow was singing fit to split his throat, and Marr stopped and peered into the tree to watch him. He pulled off his hat and laughed at the strutting airs of the feathered mite. "A tenor straight from Italy, eh?" he commented, and so far forgot his dignity as to whistle back, and there ensued a rather lopsided fugue.

"Humph!" and a woman's voice penetrated

A GINGHAM ROSE

the music in the old man's ears. Agatha Tyler stood before him, and by her side were a nurse and a baby carriage.

Marr bowed with as much of the old cynicism as the spring in the air would permit him to collect on short notice.

"I trust, Madam, that you are as well as you look?"

"Tut, tut, Doctor Marr," she laughed good-humoredly. "I am very well indeed, but I know as well as you do that I look like the very Old Nick. There seems so little time to keep one's self in order." She glanced at the baby carriage. "And you? You were acting with delightful dignity, I must say, when I came along and caught you. No doubt you thought you were a boy again. I wonder what the bird thought!"

Marr was amazed. The same woman, the usual acrid words, but in some way the sting and wrinkles had been smoothed out of the voice and a healthy humor twinkled in the gray eyes. He felt decidedly sheepish.

"Have you been adopting a family, Agatha?" he asked, blinking down inquisitively through his glasses at the rosy, puckered little face that

A GINGHAM ROSE

rested, healthy, baby-wise, not because it wanted to, but because it must, on the silk and lace pillow.

"He is Catherine's son," she said, proudly drawing the woolly blanket up to the round, soft bump that would one day be a good American chin. She glanced up at Marr and laughed. "You remember my niece Catherine, I am sure. I had my way, Doctor. She threw Warren over and married a sensible man with money in his pockets and enterprise in his head, and within a month of the tears over Warren! The rebound, you know. She is ridiculously happy!" She finished with a glance of the old defiance, but it burned itself out in a moment.

"You sent me cards," smiled Marr.

While they were talking, Young America had, by means of the skilful wriggling that unfortunately dies out with babyhood, wormed his fists out of the hateful woolly prison, and fastened with a mighty hold on Marr's walking-stick.

"Do be careful," said the woman, anxiously.

Marr gazed at her with amused patience. "I'm no fool," he laughed. "Before I took up lungs I looked after bushels of babies that would have

A GINGHAM ROSE

put you in a panic. Babies have more sense than you women think."

"Indeed!" and the smart old eyes shone. "We live just over there," she moved a hand toward a row of brownstone houses. "Catherine's day is Wednesday, but for my part I think tea is quite as good on Tuesdays. To-day is Tuesday; won't you come in? We were just going."

"I was on my way to tea," said Marr, feeling suddenly like a turncoat. Agatha Tyler had treated Anne shamefully, and he must stand by the little girl.

"I am sorry," she said, and to his bewilderment she seemed to mean it.

"You are really very good," he answered, feeling pleased in spite of himself and watching the old face shrewdly for a sign of flaw in the apparent sincerity. Suddenly his conscience drove him to his duty toward Anne.

"I was going in for tea with your—niece!" He shut his mouth tight.

"My—niece?" she echoed vaguely, then slowly light dawned. "Is she in town again?" The question was put more quietly than Marr had dared hope.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Oh, yes," he said, trying cheerfully to assume that nothing but peace ever reigned in the social spheres. "She has been in town several months finishing her novel. It has been accepted and comes out this autumn." He hoped that she might have a streak of the lion-hunter to appeal to.

"She's just the sort to write a good story," admitted Mrs. Tyler, with a dry smile.

"She lives over there, just across the square from you," he said easily, swinging his stick.

"She still winds you around her finger?"

"Oh, yes," and the confession was no less than a boast. "Agatha," he added gently, "I wonder if you have any idea how much she did to help Victor in his fight for life? You got my letter?"

She nodded her head for answer.

"Wouldn't it be sort of—civil, Agatha, to drop in to see her some day?"

"Alexander," she said, looking him square in the eyes, "I am no doubt on my way to be an angel, but I have not arrived! You ask more than mortal woman can do. Is she still so shockingly good-looking?"

"I should say so," he laughed.

A GINGHAM ROSE

She shook her head in comical despair. "I shall always detest her. Now, Alexander, go on to your tea: I am not going to quarrel with you. But take my advice and don't try drawing two sides of a city square together; the geography of the place suits me very well as it is. Come in next Tuesday at four. Ours is the house with the white shades. Catherine will be very glad to see you." With a nod that had lost much of its crisp style, but had gained something human, she walked away with one hand resting on the baby carriage.

Marr presented himself at Anne's door with his head in a whirl. "Mrs. Stetson is in, I'm sure, sir. I just came in," said the maid, as she straightened her cap. "She won't mind you, sir. Go right in."

He walked in briskly with no thought of finding any one but Anne. When John Warren rose like a young giant from his chair by the tea-table the man of science was put, for a moment, to confusion. But in a flash his talk with Victor in the bishop's garden came back to him and he remembered his promise. With a tightening of

A GINGHAM ROSE

his loyal old heart, he held out his hand cordially to John.

"Well, I declare, Warren, I seem to be meeting the entire clan this afternoon. I have just been talking,—you might say chatting,—with your would-have-been aunt-in-law. She lives just across the square. It may interest you to hear that I have actually been asked to tea!" He looked very superior and lighted his cigar with a great deal of manner. In his anxiety to keep his word to Victor and to put John at his ease he did not notice how Anne went white and bent her head very low while she made his tea.

"That *was* a close shave," laughed John. "Did she seem to regret me?" He could not make out the change in Marr, but was willing enough to accept it without questioning.

"I think," and Marr let his eyes gleam humorously into John's, "I have never known her to be so cheerful! Possibly her sadness has mellowed her," he hazarded. He was finding Warren more likable than he had thought. "Make the tea strong, Anne. I am rather excited."

Anne nodded, but did not risk her voice. She

A GINGHAM ROSE

was thinking how quietly the frail little tea-cups compel us to take a piece of big news. Her hand shook as she gave Marr his saucer.

"Did they treat you well at the publisher's?" the old man asked in a lowered voice, as his shrewd eyes took in the shaking hand. "I hope you spoke right up to 'em and gave 'em to understand that you were no speculation? You have no idea, Warren, how it annoys me that this child persists in working herself to death. I declare, she has given me an awful winter of it. Ever since October, and I don't know how much longer, she has been poring over this book. And, by George! it is a good book, and I shall go after any one who says it isn't. But the whole thing is nonsense!"

"I met John around there," she smiled up at Marr. She loved him best when he got into a tantrum about her work. "They had selected him to illustrate the story, and he did not know it was mine until he came in. Odd, wasn't it?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" ruminated the doctor, absently. He had been wondering how in the world it had happened. It seemed to him he

A GINGHAM ROSE

could hear Victor saying, "I told you, Marr, that they would find each other." He had loved Victor, and it appeared to him just then that justice was a trifle cruel.

Anne gazed at Marr in amazement, but he seemed unconscious of his profanity, and John decided with some amusement that the old gentleman had been spending the afternoon at his club. After a little light talk about nothing in particular, John rose to go. He held Anne's hand tight and asked earnestly, "May I come in now and then to talk over the drawings?"

"Do, do!" interjected Marr, with absent-minded enthusiasm. With a gasp he remembered himself. "Anne, child, I beg your pardon." He flushed, then laughed awkwardly. "That comes of making an old man so at home."

She put her hand on his sleeve and turned to John. "Come as often as you like. I shall be glad to see you." The two men shook hands vigorously and John departed.

The evenings were still sharp and Anne called the maid to build a little fire in the grate, then she handed Marr the evening paper.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Now you are to amuse yourself a while and I shall get off this heavy dress and we'll be more comfortable. You will stay to dinner?"

"Of course, of course," and Marr settled himself in a big chair and watched the maid build the fire.

Anne smiled to herself as she left the room. He was decidedly upset about something, and she guessed at half. She came back in a house-dress of soft white stuff and drew a low chair close to the fresh spluttering fire and watched the color through her fingers. Marr sat lost in a cloud of smoke, with the paper limp and unread over his knees. "Why did you not tell me that they—that Catherine and John had never married?" She looked around at him over her shoulder.

"It was none of *my* business;" and Marr hid in the smoke.

"You'll spoil your dinner, smoking. There is chicken to-night, too," she remarked, and turned her eyes back to the fire. He puffed away in stubborn silence. "Well, one good thing," she said at last, "the story will be beautifully illustrated."

A GINGHAM ROSE

The maid announced dinner and Marr made no effort at conversation till after he had attended to the carving. "I suppose," he remarked, with a piece of white meat poised on his fork, "it is just that baby that has taken the temper out of Agatha Tyler!"

Anne opened her eyes wide. "What baby?" she asked.

"Why, Catherine's baby," retorted Marr, with satirical patience.

"Is Catherine married?" gasped Anne. "I'm so glad."

Several amused answers flickered about the old man's mouth, but he salted his potatoes before he spoke. "Well," he said slowly, "I'm glad, too! He seemed a fine baby!" Then these good friends gave in to a laugh, the kind of laugh that leaves the eyes wet.

CHAPTER XXXV

For as a rhyme unto its rhyme-twin goes,
I send a rose unto a rose.

—SIDNEY LANIER.

ONE DAY'S LETTERS.

Dear Nancy:

More than likely I do not deserve it, but be your old generous self and send me around your copy of your manuscript to read, and send it no later than this *very* morning, because I am all impatience. It may be a long time before they send it to me from the house, you know. They never give the picture man any more time than he needs. I have been blinking at the light all morning, Nancy, like a fellow who has been kept down cellar long. It is wonderful to have found you again like this. You will never know how glad I am, how good it is to *know* where you are.

Faithfully,

JOHN. :

A GINGHAM ROSE

Dear John:

Of course you do not deserve it, and for just that reason here is the manuscript, and "no later than this very morning!" And, John, one glance at the manuscript will tell you better than I can how much I want to know what you think.

As ever, ANNE.

Dear Nancy:

You can guess what I felt when my eyes took in the title-page of your book. In a flash we were all back there again, in the old studio with the fiddlers and the masks, and you, bless you, in the gingham dress. Dear "kid," was there thorn enough in that freak of boyish jealousy and selfishness to bring forth this full-blown rose-tree of a book? It wasn't so hopeless, after all, then, was it? For the book is good, mighty good, and I like good work as well as the next. It is all the same game, is it not, whether you work in words or lines? And never since the "trade" began were such pictures sprouting in an illustrator's head as in mine right now. I am fairly breaking out with ideas that I must talk over with you at once. I have been sitting up here the livelong day with the book and my pipe, for all the world

A GINGHAM ROSE

as if there were no frantic art editors! I find that there is a symphony concert to-night, and unless you convince me that you have something very much better to do I shall come by for you about eight. You'll need to be mighty convincing.

Yours indeed,

JOHN.

Anne wrote seven notes before one was finally sent. Here are the first and the last:

THE FIRST.

John Dear:

I am perfectly thankful that you like the book: I was afraid to open your note! I've nothing in the world to do to-night and the concert is an inspiration. Thank you for thinking of it.

As ever, NANCY.

THE SEVENTH.

Dear John:

I am disconsolate, of course, but I have an engagement to-night that it would hardly be fair to break. Let's see—this is Wednesday, isn't it? Won't you come in on Sunday afternoon for tea?

As ever,

ANNE.

A GINGHAM ROSE

That evening, after a very lonesome dinner—Marr had failed to put in his appearance—the maid brought in a long lavender box. Inside was a note and a big, long-stemmed, thorny rose.

I didn't think it of you! All right, I shall try to take my medicine like a man. I hope you are good and sorry before Sunday comes. Dear kid, what is the use? Patiently yours,

JOHN.

Anne got the scissors and snipped off all the little thorns along the long stem, then she took the rose and went to the big settle by the fireplace. She got back in the corner as far as possible; she wanted to be more alone than alone could be. She put her head down on a cushion and shut her eyes and sniffed at the big sweet rose. "It will do him good," she sighed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Fireflies already sparkling under the bridge,—
And it is not yet dark!

—JAPANESE POEM.

Three o'clock Saturday afternoon found Anne, the penitent, at John's studio door, her hand, from habit, groping for the knocker he had counted among his especially choice "finds." But the knocker was gone, had been torn off roughly, and the nail-holes were splintered like jagged scars. Puzzled, she tapped on the panel: a heavy, telltale silence ensued. She tapped again, more lightly: two words, the weaker of which was "oh," were muttered in the studio. She smiled and waited. Having taken his time and hearing no one depart, John sang out, "No models wanted! Try in number forty; there's a beginner in there!" Anne laughed to herself; this was better fun than she had hoped for, and evidently John had few visitors, or he'd not dare talk so. She tapped boldly.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"Come in," sighed John, giving it up. She opened the door just enough to be heard without raising her voice: "It's I,—Anne."

"Holy Moses!" groaned John, fairly tumbling to the door, stuffing his pipe into his pocket, apologizing, and smoothing his hair. He gazed down on her unbelievably, while half a dozen emotions struggled over his face, anxiety rather having the best of it.

She drew back into the hall. "You see," she laughed, feeling embarrassed for some reason or other, "I did get 'good and sorry before Sunday,' and here I am. Am I forgiven?"

"You forgiven!" echoed John, with a sincerity that was disconcerting. "Nancy," he hesitated, "I've a model, and a pretty fierce one, I must admit. But come on inside and I'll send her away."

"But if you are working I'll not come in, of course," and she turned resolutely away from the door.

"Come in," repeated John, determination having beaten anxiety finally. After one glance at him she came in without further argument. She stood looking about utterly bewildered. The

A GINGHAM ROSE

studio she remembered as orderly and charming was dismantled; the door into his room, which he had always left open because of the effect of the fireplace and the small window, was shut fast; the restful spaces of simple wall were littered with shelves and cupboards, and the Japanese print that used to hang above Catherine's picture was unframed and hung upside down by one pin against a shelf. The model she recognized as a girl who used to pose at Chase's, and she nodded at her curiously. She stood like a dejected exotic bird in a drooping skirt of faded pink tulle and a tawdry, bejeweled bodice of satin. The long cotton stockings were a raw pink, grotesquely loose and wrinkled, and her feet looked like stumps in the satin sandals. She seemed embarrassed and frisked about with pitiful coquetry and assurance.

John caught up a piece of "background," and, dumping a heap of *Jugends* and *Gil Blas* off a chair, dusted it and offered it to Anne. "Not a very good place, this, for togs, Nancy," he smiled, with a glance at her dress. Then he turned and observed the frisking tulle and cotton with a twinkle in his eye.

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I'll not need you any more to-day," he said. She disappeared behind a screen in a corner to dress and emerged so soon that Anne felt sure the cotton stockings had decided to walk home! But the tulle had given way to a decorous, nay, tragic, sweep of black, and the wide hat and ornate veil obscured the silly face and made the eyes as restless and bright as a suspicious, peering squirrel's. She took her pay, nodded to Anne smartly, and swished away.

"I remember her very well," smiled Anne. "She used to sit in a nightgown between poses and talk to us wide-eyed youngsters about the dangers of posing!"

"I noticed that you seemed to upset her some," smiled John.

Anne looked about the room again and finished with a careful scrutiny of John himself.

"Have you moved, John?" she asked at last, feeling more and more bewildered.

"Yes," said John, stubbornly; "I moved the day I saw you last, before you went away. I kept the old number just for—sentiment!" He laughed bitterly.

Her mouth trembled a little and she looked

A GINGHAM ROSE

away at the window. With a little cry she got to her feet and walked over to the scarlet geranium that bloomed brighter than ever on the ledge. "How do you do?" she nodded quaintly. "I think you are the only person here that I have ever met before!" She bent down and touched the pungent blossom with her cheek. Then she turned and looked John straight in the eyes. It was the first time they had really looked at each other since their paths had crossed again. The masks were off: the whole place and both the young faces told their stories of that fiercest of revolutions, the war that goes to the finish between every man and himself. When the silence became unbearable and the tension too tight Anne turned back to the window.

"You like this drawing, Nancy?" John asked in a painfully steady voice.

She went quietly back to her chair and looked at the drawing. It was a study of some theatrical incident and done with no aim other than the thing itself—no technic, no tone.

"John," she said gently, "you have no idea how I have watched for your work all these months. I knew from the very first that some-

A GINGHAM ROSE

thing had happened. I thought it was Catherine. I did not know until you and Marr were joking over your tea about Mrs. Tyler that you were not married."

"No one told you?" and John looked at her in blank amazement.

"No one," she said. "And I am glad they did not."

"I lost myself that night after I left you, Nancy, and came in here and tore the place down about my own head. Then I wrote Catherine a letter. She never got it, fortunately. Her aunt intercepted it, read it and returned it to me with some choice comment that I no doubt deserved. A letter from Catherine crossed mine to her. It accomplished the same thing. She threw me over. Her aunt is an excellent manager." He smiled and stood with folded arms, smoking his pipe and watching Anne doggedly through the smoke.

Anne's eyes absorbed the drawing and for a while she sat thinking.

"Your work used to terrify me, John. It had something about it for a while, a heavy kind of terrible strength that smothered me just as the

A GINGHAM ROSE

desert out there smothered me. It seemed to me it must break of its own weight. We have both paid pretty dear."

"I don't mind for myself," he said thickly. "I needed a beating and got it; but it kills me to think what you have gone through. I was so blind!"

She shook her head and smiled. "No, you were not; at least, if you were, you were not the only one. Perhaps the blindness is a sort of epidemic, John, like the measles, and good for growing youngsters. I had to learn the price of playing heroics, you see. You can't go to the theater for nothing, whether you go in at the stage door or by the box-office. But one thing I am thankful for, John; Victor never guessed what I felt. I thought sometimes I'd shriek out about it, do what I would. Do you remember the day I talked to you, scolded you, John, about what would happen to you if you married Catherine?"

John did not think more than a glance necessary for answer.

"Well, I simply had to take my own medicine.

A GINGHAM ROSE

I *would* be wise and set myself up for a prophet, and had to be taken down and taught my place. It's terrible out in that dead country. You can't imagine the silence. And everybody laughs to keep up his courage, while he plays at cheating death. And the worst of it for me was that they all believed in me so, and sometimes I hated them so it nearly killed me. I had to live a lie. Well, I did it, and he never knew. It was the best I could do." Her low voice told its part of the torture between the lines.

Suddenly John bent over her and gathered her hands in his and pressed them against his face. "You have been saved for me," he whispered. "Why, God knows, Anne,—" he began, and stood straight before her, giving himself no quarter.

"John!" she got to her feet and looked at him imploringly. "Don't tell me about—anything!" she whispered. "Don't! I'd rather not know." She smiled at him unsteadily. "You see, I am just a grown up little girl, after all, and I can't let go of my fairy tales. I'd rather be credulous about you except just as you are to me."

A GINGHAM ROSE

"After all," sighed John, pulling himself together firmly, "there isn't anything to tell that matters to you and me."

She walked over to the sketch and stood thinking a moment. "Do you know," she turned to him frankly, "I don't think things really scar us, unless we love ugliness for itself and hold fast to it. Why, to-day, as I came along the street, in the sunlight, I felt as young as ever so long ago, and fearless, and—transparent—almost. I wanted to run; I was as good as new—maybe better! Do you understand me?" She looked at him searchingly.

John put his hands about her face and looked down into her eyes. "You could go to the bottom of hell, dear, and come back clean-hearted."

"And with a bit or two of news?" she laughed.

John went to the window and threw it wide. The spring air rushed about the dusty room like cool water through a parched throat. He leaned far out, taking in great breaths. Anne came and stood with her arms on the ledge and her eyes on the geranium between them.

"Well, Nancy, we have the whole summer before us; did you know it?"

A GINGHAM ROSE

"I guessed as much," she said solemnly.

"I was a spendthrift with the last one we were given, but I shall be a miser with this one."

Anne watched the thin trail of smoke that wafted back into the room from his pipe. "I shall not begin work till fall; then I am going to tackle a new book," she said.

"That's what you are," said John, firmly.

The place was still for a while. "Johnny," said Anne, quietly, "do you remember the last time I was up here, and watching the smoke from that factory over there made me dizzy; and when I said I'd like to break into white smoke, you said something about how I'd have to go through the coal-hole and the furnace first?"

"That is one of the things," said John, grimly, "that I have tried so hard to forget and remembered all the better for the trying. There is the devil in trying; did you know it, kid?"

"I never heard it put in quite such a classic way before," she admitted. "Are you going to be in town this summer?" she asked.

"Are you?" he answered.

"Mostly," she said.

"Mostly," he answered. "We'll have all those

A GINGHAM ROSE

Sunday afternoons over again, with some—modern improvements,” he laughed, leaning toward her. She put out her hand and held the scarlet flowers away from his sleeve. “You’ll break your tried friend,” she said earnestly. “It is getting late, John. I must go home.”

“Yes; I think you must,” admitted John, folding his arms tight and looking down at her.

She went rather precipitately, stumbling over nothing in particular several times on her way to the door. She walked home: a street-car was not to be thought of; narrow and crowded places they are, especially in the springtime! She looked up at the sky, bright and pink in the evening glow, and because of the dazzling sunlight saw none of the cobwebs that certainly hang over the city from roof to roof, from spire to spire. The blessed season of springtime, the better, the deeper, no doubt, if a little late in coming!

CHAPTER XXXVII

This is a dream—but no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs,
Follow each other with unwavering powers.

—BROWNING.

The summer fairly flew by, reflecting all its wonders in Anne's blue eyes. There was proof-reading to do and the drawings to be made; they were done somehow, too, and thoroughly. The lost Sundays of that other summer, that verily seemed a thousand years ago, had been more than reclaimed and of improvements there seemed no end.

The breeze blew in so pleasantly across the tree-tops of the square, there was really no sense in going out of town for more than a day or two now and then. Anne and John had gone to all sorts of places, tried every direction and called the experiments "going to Rome." Indeed, it was just that! One day away in a boat, down the meandering little Bronx, with its secretive rushes and absurd beating-about-the-bush way of going

A GINGHAM ROSE

along, with lunch and laziness in the shade of some low-voiced willow that had, of course, grown there just to edify them on their way to "Rome."

Perhaps there was some whimsical, far-seeing talk about the character of trees as they drifted along, odd scraps of curious truth that dare find a voice when one really lets go and drifts downstream of a sun-soaked summer afternoon. Or maybe a Sunday at Rockaway or Coney, to give every possible road to Rome a trial. They watched the old-faced children, the mad, dizzy, work-tired, and freedom-drunk mob, dropping their hard-earned pennies into harlot-decked slot machines, just for the fun of seeing what an under-fed body weighs; more pennies for beer in a dance-hall, then furious dancing to get rid of the energy of hysterics. Everywhere they went,—except to the park. Something unspoken, but understood, there was about going to the park. It was to come when the summer had gone; was to be put off to the very last moment, then snatched away from the oncoming winter some Indian summer day. And autumn was here, was slipping by; it would no longer be denied.

A GINGHAM ROSE

One Saturday afternoon John dropped in for tea, and though he had done the same thing every Saturday, there was something mightily significant in the air. He was very much pre-occupied and Anne talked with a brilliancy that would have fatally dazzled a man who did not already know that she couldn't help it. When he rose to go he stood a moment, then said unevenly: "I think there may be very few more good Sundays—bright ones, I mean. Shall we go up to the park for supper to-morrow?"

"If you like," she answered, and the color flew to her cheeks, but her eyes were clear as day.

While she was dressing the next afternoon she remembered that nothing had been said about a meeting place. Often she went by for him, because thus they could more certainly avoid any one who might be coming in to see her. In the end she decided that she would risk it and go for him, just as she had that other Sunday—that awful day, when she had dared speak her mind about his getting married! She pinned her hat on tight; it was a half cloudy and very breezy day. She had not allowed herself to think of rain. When she got downstairs to the glass

A GINGHAM ROSE

storm-door, there was John on the other side of the glass, just coming in.

"Were you running away from me?" he asked reproachfully.

"Not according to my best understanding," she laughed.

"But, dear," the word was some way vastly important, "we might have missed each other!"

"But—dear," she echoed gently, "we didn't!"

"It's raining," announced John, and for once in a way a remark about the weather was in earnest.

"The park will keep," she smiled.

They stood a moment watching the big drops as they turned the pavements into mirrors, then they went back, and up in the elevator. These prosaic things all may mean so much.

They talked and read aloud, and made tea, and thought—more than anything else they thought, but after the manner of the initiated the thinking was all aloud.

And how it did rain! But the rainy pavements and skies of autumn work a wonder of comfort indoors. As the dusk settled down the whole dream of the whole summer was swept aside in a

A GINGHAM ROSE

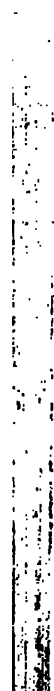
better reality ; even the rather stilted if true conversation of a certain lady elephant-ear was not noticeably regretted.

When it had grown too dark to read Anne put the book back on the shelf, and when she turned there was John, standing with outstretched arms.

After what was, really, a very long time, he said: "Dear, I have never half told you how proud I am of you, of your success." It was a foolish speech, but it was the best he could think of.

"Don't waste time being proud, John," she whispered.

THE END



1

2

3

4

5

6



**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



